

**With the 52nd (Lowland) division in three continents, by James Young, RAMC, Lieutenant-Colonel commanding 1/3rd Lowland Field Ambulance in the Dardanelles, Egypt and Palestine during the First World War**

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WITH THE 52ND (LOWLAND) DIVISION—YOUNG

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22nd Nov 1864

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55th Infantry Brigade

52nd Div. L.A.

D.E.F.



WITH THE  
52<sup>ND</sup> (LOWLAND) DIVISION  
IN THREE CONTINENTS

BY  
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LIEUT. COLONEL  
COMMANDING 1/3 LOWLAND FIELD AMBULANCE

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1920

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TO  
THE OFFICERS, N.C.O.'S, AND MEN  
WHO HAVE MADE  
TRADITIONS OF WHICH ANY UNIT  
MIGHT BE PROUD

## PREFACE

THE doings of the 52nd (Lowland) Division are here related as seen through the eyes of an R.A.M.C. officer, who served continuously with the Division except during a short period of sickness. The narrative was largely written during the war, when military needs prevented the revelation of many details without which a record of campaigns must suffer in fulness of interest.

The story is rather of the nature of impressions than of actual history, but it has the advantage of continuity. It often touches only lightly on times which loom large in the memory of the Division—the long, weary, and trying months of trench-life, the perspiring days and nights of bivouac under the blazing skies and the stars of the desert, and the stern, rushing days of battle.

The book appeared as articles in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, and for permission to publish them in collected form the author is indebted to the editors of that journal.

The author desires to express his gratitude to Major W. W. Greer, M.C., for the materials for Chapter VI.; and to Sgt. A. S. B. Hubbard for his services in typing the sheets for the press.

Most of the illustrations are from photographs taken by the author or his batman, Private A. Dickie. Those representing "The Desert Hospital Train" and "The R.A.M.C. on the March" appeared in Sgt.-Major Tickner-Edwards' book, *With the R.A.M.C. in Egypt*, and the author is indebted to him and his publishers, Messrs. Cassell & Co., for permission to use them here.

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A FIELD AMBULANCE IN GALLIPOLI, EGYPT,  
PALESTINE, AND FRANCE.

By JAMES YOUNG, D.S.O., M.D., F.R.C.S.(Edin.),  
Lieutenant-Colonel, R.A.M.C.

I. OFF TO GALLIPOLI.

IN retrospect it seems a very long time since that day in early June of 1915 when we set sail for "Service Overseas." It is only a matter of three years and a half, but into this short interval, which would ordinarily slip past in a man's life without much comment, there have been crowded mingled experiences of trial and triumph, pleasure and sorrow. Even to the youngest and most unthinking the thrilling realities have worn right through to the very core. We have known and we have felt, and our knowledge and our feeling have been gathered amid the surging tempest of war. We have lived our life under many skies and we have watched the swaying fortunes of battle in several continents. To a man we are different; we may claim rightly and with pride that we are veterans of war.

It was with bounding hearts after ten months' residence in Stirling that we at last received the message to prepare to embark for abroad. The ten months spent after mobilisation at home tried us sorely, for we felt that we were ready for foreign service long before the call came. The intense desire for work in foreign fields and the burning spirit of adventure that overspread the country during the early days had caught us in their net. We drilled and we marched, we "carried stretchers" and we "lowered stretchers" till our arms ached and our backs rebelled, and we envied the men who were called early.

It came at last. We feverishly collected our new waggons and harness from ordnance and our horses from remounts. We worked day and night and we were at last ready. It was to be France. We knew it, for our equipment was of the pattern used in France. And then we got orders to send it all back! Instead of heavy ambulance waggons we got light ambulance waggons, and instead of horses we got mules. We knew now that we were going East. What a pandemonium there was the night the long procession of mules arrived! Then there was the fitting of harness and the endless arranging and rearranging of teams and drivers. The mules were fresh from the ranches of Argentine

and our horsemanship was sorely tested. But the will was there, and in a few days we stood by ready to move.

Two long trains took us south to Devonport. We found that on the boat allotted to us there was room for only one officer, so Captain Groer was elected to accompany the unit, as he was Transport Officer and the main trials of a voyage always concern the animals. The other officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Ross, Majors Young and McIntosh (Quartermaster), and Captains Brown, Walker, Hunter, Stewart, Smith, and Linklater left on the 3rd June. The remainder of the unit left the following day.

Looking back over it all, one of the greatest days we have ever had was that day when we swept slowly down the estuary from Devonport to the sea, accompanied by our two T.B.D. escorts, silent wardens of our fate, with their funnels belching forth great black clouds of smoke. Once outside, they aligned themselves one on either side, and we were off.

These were intense days of pleasure and expectation. Nobody knew where we were going. We whispered under our breaths that it must be the Dardanelles, but the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean was obscure at that time and we could only guess. At times we feared it might be garrison duty in Egypt, but from that unpleasant prospect our active spirits recoiled.

Every day of the voyage was full of interest. We were, most of us, sailing strange seas and visiting ports that, save for the fortune of war, we probably never would have seen.

We wanted to see Gibraltar, but we called there at night for orders, and saw nothing but the lights of the town rising tier upon tier from the water's edge in a great semicircle, and the searchlights that turned on their blinding flashes as we approached the shore.

We shall never forget the sight of Malta as we saw it bathed in the early morning sun. We have seen some of the greatest sights on this earth—the Pyramids of the Nile standing eternal amid their desert of shifting sand; Cairo with its minarets and domes and the great panorama of colour as viewed from the Citadel; the temples of Thebes; and Jerusalem as first seen in its high mountain fastnesses, with the shadows playing over the distant mountains of Moab. We have seen all these, yet we do not think any of them ever affected us so much with a sense of beauty and wonder as the first sight of Malta when we swept round it that morning from the south. The island lay bathed in the rays of the early morning sun and set in a sea as smooth

as glass and of the purest of blues. It looked for all the world like an island of dreams. Though so far west it was the first revelation to us of the enchantment of the East. What adorns the long stretch of land and captures the senses and imagination is the town of Valetta that crowns the summit. It extends in irregular fashion over the higher land and down as far as the cliffs of the purest of yellow sandstone, which catch and throw back the rays of the morning sun. It is like a city of the *Arabian Nights*. Fashioned out of the sandstone, it rises terrace upon terrace to the summit, with here and there a spire thrusting its head into the heavens. In the sun the whole is of a creamy-white colour.

As we lay at anchor coaling we had an experience which inspired us greatly. A French battleship swept past us at a few yards' distance on its way to the sea. As it passed, the sailors, with their red-tasselled caps, lined up in their hundreds and were called to attention. A band struck up "God Save the King" from a platform near the bridge. The French naval officers in their blue surtouts saluted. After one verse of the National Anthem they played "Tipperary." Our men, who were crowded on the decks, could contain themselves no longer. They raised cheer upon cheer as the monster glided by, and received answering cheers from the French sailors. Such incidents as these are helpful and inspiring, especially in these days when war is so much shorn of its glamour. We were in the mood and we responded. We continued on our way the better for it.

We had thought that we were going straight for Gallipoli and were a bit disappointed when we found ourselves heading for Alexandria. The first party arrived there on 16th June, the remainder on 18th June. Our sojourn in Egypt on this occasion was destined to be short. We pitched our camp on the sands at Aboukir, which is on the coast some miles east of Alexandria. This short spell is chiefly noteworthy for the extreme heat which we suffered. The day we arrived, as luck would have it, was the hottest day that Alexandria had experienced (so the newspapers declared) for forty years. The few days we spent at Aboukir were like days spent in a furnace-room, and were passed by most of us in a half-prostrate condition, in which exercise of any sort, and even feeding, was a task. In a short time we should have become baked into indifference.

But fate had its hold on us, and on 28th June we again embarked at Alexandria. This time there was no doubt that we



were off to the Dardanelles. Again we were split up between two ships, the *Menominee* and the *Albion Castle*, the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel Ross) and the unit on the latter, the other officers on the former.

Two days afterwards we dropped anchor in the bay of Mudros. Then for the first time we began to feel the imminence of battle. There was a constant bustle in the bay, which was crowded with transports of all sorts and sizes. Ships were constantly arriving with fresh troops or departing empty for a fresh load. From the deck of our vessel we could see trawlers passing laden with wounded men and we could see others with their load of death.

## II. WE LAND ON GALLIPOLI.

Whilst we were still at Aboukir we met officers and men who had been at Gallipoli and who had been invalided to Egypt sick or wounded. It was after meeting them that we began to realise, though still only dimly, the fate that was awaiting us. The stories we heard then were such as were calculated to damp the ardour of all except the boldest or the ignorant. And we were in the latter category. We learnt of the beaches that were shell-swept by night and by day, and landing on them was at all times a matter of considerable risk. And then we were told that after you had landed your existence was a nightmare, for our troops were "hanging on by their teeth" to a narrow strip round the water's edge. So we were told by a staff officer who came to see us and to advise us regarding the equipment we were to take with us.

Colour was lent to all these tales when we received orders that no horses or waggons were to be taken to the Peninsula. They were all to be left behind in Egypt. All equipment was to be man-handled after landing. Those who know the extent and the tonnage of a field ambulance's equipment, as we did to our cost, will not be surprised to learn that this announcement caused consternation and dismay in our midst. But we had come out to face the worst ordeals and this was no time for turning back. We decided to leave fate to settle how a field ambulance could work for even one day without horses and waggons. We had not yet learned that spirit of calm submission and waiting for events which later experience inevitably fosters in the Army, and, as almost invariably happens, we found in this case that subsequent events proved our initial fears to be largely groundless.

On the night of the 2nd July the first party, consisting of the officers who had been split off from the unit at Alexandria and who travelled on the *Menominee*, set sail for Gallipoli. One of the officers went ahead on a T. B. destroyer, which was carrying a half battalion of infantry, to explore and prepare for the others. The remainder of this officer's party transhipped to a trawler. At this time, and throughout the campaign, all traffic to the Peninsula took place on smaller vessels, chiefly because of the added submarine risks run by larger craft. The larger transports never came beyond Mudros. Here all troops and ammunition and stores were transhipped to trawlers. A large fleet of this class of vessel, which in all theatres of the war has played such a great part, was kept running day and night between Mudros and the various beaches at Gallipoli. The only large vessels ever seen in the neighbourhood of the Peninsula were warships and hospital ships. In the earlier days even hospital ships were rarely seen, and the evacuation of the wounded was carried out by means of returning empty trawlers.

The passage from Mudros to Cape Helles, where our lot was to be cast for many months, was only a matter of an hour or two, and we landed safely at V Beach before dawn on 3rd July. This beach, which figures so prominently in the original landing in April, is on the south side of the tip of the Peninsula. It was here that the transport liner, the *River Clyde*, was run ashore. Suddenly opening up her sides, she poured forth the men that swarmed to the shore through the water or across the lighters that were shoved in between the ship and the beach. The whole operation was carried out under a constant and severe fusillade from the Turkish machine guns placed on the neighbouring slopes. One had only to see the place to realise the awfulness of the task which these men faced and carried out, though it was only a fraction of them that reached the shore.

It was here that our first officer party landed, just as dawn was breaking on the morning of 3rd July. The wind had risen and the sea was rough and it was no easy task. The trawler drew alongside a bridge of lighters placed against the side of the *River Clyde*. One had to clamber on to the lower deck of this vessel and then along a swaying narrow plank bridge slung from the port side. From this one you passed to another bridge of lighters which conducted you ashore.

We were at last on the battlefield! The Turks had not commenced to shell the beach yet, but they would soon start



when they saw the troops landing, for we were under direct observation from the Asiatic shore of the mouth of the Dardanelles. As we learnt very soon, the Turk kept a very watchful eye on the doings on this beach, and on W Beach, which was just round the corner on the northern side of the toe of the Peninsula. This was also called Lancashire Landing, in memory of the gallant Lancashire Battalion of the 29th Division which here fought its way to shore in the last days of April. The Turk could see movements, and he was not long in sending across a salvo from Asia or from Achi Baba to harass any traffic that he had spied.

So we were told to hurry off the beach as quick as our legs would carry us. And we did. We climbed the banks that slope on all sides down to the cove, and were soon breakfasting with a field ambulance which had arrived some days before and was meanwhile camped on the flat ground overlooking W Beach.

We had not been there more than ten minutes before we experienced our first shelling. It was the morning *straf* of W Beach from Asia, and the shells just missed our heads on the way to the beach. We were hungry men, but we did not relish our breakfast on that occasion. We had our first taste of modern war and we didn't like it. The imminence of danger was so great that I think few of us thought that morning that we would see the day through. But time works wonders, and even shells create indifference after a time.

Cape Helles was badly placed for shelling. It could be shelled either from Achi Baba or from Asia. The Straits are only a matter of three miles wide, and the Turk had many batteries situated on the further shore to molest our flank. He was fond of dodging guns about on the Asiatic side, so that you never knew from which direction you were going to be shelled next. A big gun that he used largely there went under the nickname of "Asiatic Annie."

The solitary band of officers without a unit, for we had heard nothing of the ambulance since we left Alexandria, dug themselves in to await the turn of events. We spent the time in exploring the neighbourhood. We saw the guns at the fort of Sedd-el-Bahr which had been wrecked by our Navy in February and March. We visited the crumbling buildings that had once been the village of Sedd-el-Bahr, and we watched the frequent British and Turkish artillery bombardments on the hill slopes of Achi Baba some miles inland.

We chose a clear piece of ground about three-quarters of a

mile in from the shore for our ambulance, and we hoisted a Red Cross flag to warn the Turks of our prospective arrival.

The commanding officer and the ambulance arrived on the morning of 6th July. We could see from our vantage ground on the shore the trawler pull in towards W Beach laden with its khaki figures. Little realising the precious cargo it carried we wondered, and we saw others wonder, when the Turks would open on it. But we did not wonder long. When it had come close up to the pier of sunken ships, which formed at once the landing-stage at W Beach and the breakwater for smaller craft, a ranging shell flew overhead and splashed into the water just beyond our incoming trawler. Another and another fell in quick succession all round, and we thought she was doomed. Then, to our relief, she pulled out and the Turkish fire ceased. Later in the day she ventured in again and discharged her load, which we now learnt was our expected unit. They landed at W Beach amidst shelling, but we had only one trivial casualty—Private M'Morran. This man, to us all, will ever have a tragic association, for he was the only man who was wounded at the landing, and when we went into battle some days after he was the first man to be hit, and by a bullet which killed him practically outright.

Our fears in Egypt regarding transport for our stores and equipment, we now learnt, had been groundless. We managed to charter some Indian mule carts, which we had with us throughout the rest of the campaign. These were subsequently to prove of great value. They were small open carts drawn by a couple of small mules and driven by an Indian driver. The cart we called the "garry" and the man the "garrywallah." They did noble service throughout, and the wallahs proved to be quiet, obedient, uncomplaining, and daringly brave. During their work they would chant their monotonous Indian dirge-like songs, and at night, when their work was done, you would hear them play their plaintive pipe to the moon.

Within a few days we were hard at work digging our camp. We were novices then, and the remembrance of our early digging efforts provokes a smile. We were adepts at pitching a camp of tents, but our training had never taken into consideration the prospects of a subterranean life. We were, however, anxious to learn, and the dire necessity of protection against the enemy shells that constantly pestered us made us apter pupils than we ever thought to be.

We soon had funk holes for ourselves and patients, and our

camp gradually took shape. This was our main dressing station, and here we remained during the whole six months of the campaign. Throughout that time constant developments in our premises took place, until at the end we had quite a large hospital below the ground surface. There were five long deep trenches, two of which were allotted to the hospital. These were covered against the weather with corrugated iron resting on walls of sand bags. Alcoves were dug forward from the trench and formed the wards, and at the end we had a large bay fitted with doors and glass windows for the operating theatre. But these were very late developments. Our early efforts were carried out in face of a constant shortage of engineering materials, such as timber and corrugated iron, and, looking back on it, one wonders how we ever managed to maintain an ambulance working with a decent semblance of efficiency.

Throughout the larger part of the time the weather was good, and waterproof sheets slung across the trench alcoves sufficed to keep the blazing sun off the faces of our patients. But the rains of October were on us before the long-promised engineer supplies had arrived. With the first suggestion of broken weather we held a council of war and decided to dare the Turks and pitch our tents, which till that time we had refrained from doing for fear of the consequences. But we found the Turk a sport on this occasion as on others. He respected our flag, and our tents remained from that day till the end, with additions now and then as our patients increased. On no occasion did we ever find the Turk disregard the Convention of the Red Cross, and several times we have satisfied ourselves that he exercised special care in steering his shells clear of our camp. We have often had shells in our camp, but we have a strong belief that they were accidental.

At the time we landed, and whilst we were settling down in our new quarters, there had been a lull in the battle for Achi Baba. But it flared up within a few days, and we were hardly dug in when we found ourselves thrust into one of the fiercest battles which it has been our lot to serve in during all these years.

Our division was fighting beside the Royal Naval Division, and it was decided that, to begin with, we should send up officers and men to assist the ambulances of this division at their advanced dressing stations, which were to serve the frontage of our division and their own.

The advanced stations were situated in the Achi Baba Nullah (or valley), the forward one about three miles from our main dressing station, the nearer one about three-quarters of a mile behind this. The former had been called the Wholly Cross dressing station by the East Lancashire men who first built it; the latter was called Skew Bridge dressing station, after the fanciful title of a small bridge across the burn, which trickled down the Achi Baba Nullah, to open into the Hellespont at the broad, sandy inlet of Merto Bay.

To regain as far as possible the sensations of the moment, which are preferable to a bare record culled from memory, the next chapters are extracted from a diary written at the time, the gaps of which are now filled in, in respect of matters which had to be shrouded in secrecy when it was written. To those of us for whom war has lost its edge, and whose original sensibilities are somewhat dulled, these extracts may seem over-vivid, but I prefer them because they are living. They were hammered out hot on the anvil of reality.

### III. OUR FIRST BATTLE—ACHI BABA.

12th July 1915.

We are in the very thick of it. All day long there is the roar of guns, interrupted only by short spells, when, by contrast, the peace seems too profound for this world. At this moment the roar and crash are greater than usual. Since the early morning the guns around us have been hurling their message of hate into the Turkish trenches. From my dug-out I can see the flashes, repeated with awful rapidity, of a French battery that lies over from us, just a few hundred yards away. Every now and then there is a bang, a whiz, and a great cloud of earth and stones thrown into the air, as the Turkish shell vainly tries to find the guns that are concealed with wonderful ingenuity. Immediately after there is a crash, as the earth's cry of agony reaches our dug-outs.

For a short time earlier in the morning the guns suddenly became quiet, and, from the slopes of Achi Baba that are exposed to our full view, there arose almost immediately a terrific clattering of musketry and machine-guns. We knew then that our gallant fellows had left their trenches, with set teeth, and their Scotch faces glowing with the fire that on this battlefield meant only one thing, as it had meant on many a battlefield in the past.



It was to be death or glory. Even now we have heard, as we expected it, of their success, though we shall have to wait till later in the day to know the full proportion of the victory.

Our intense interest in the happenings on the hillside is increased by the fact that many of the fellows taking part in it are well known to us all, and also by the fact that the greater part of our ambulance is up there taking part in its first action. The three junior officers are out with them. We had to send two officers to fill regimental medical jobs temporarily. I hope it may be very temporary, for we are left very short-handed.

The spirit of our fellows is magnificent. Now that the time has come they are keen to show themselves worthy. There was disappointment in many hearts this morning when they found they could not all go into action. Our eyes followed them as they set off two at a time, with their stretchers and their surgical haversacks towards the din of battle. They were soon lost to sight in the mist of sand and smoke that by this time enveloped everything. They knew what they were going to, and they went with willing hearts. My heart is anxious for them. It is perhaps too much to expect them all back scathless, but let us hope no dreadful thing will overwhelm them. We will know soon. The inferno is as bad as ever. One wonders how anything could live through it. The noise is terrible, and the earth seems to shake to its very heart. God help them all!

The scene where the intensest conflict is raging looks quite close to us. The roar of cannon now is constant, and is so deafening that one even here can hardly hear oneself speaking. Through it all one can see men and horses or mules and ammunition waggons crossing the country, or setting off in a panic when a shell bursts too near. Our own men, who are left, are deepening the trenches, stopping every now and then on their spades to see how things are going. Just then, during a momentary hush, a yellow-breasted bird flew by, chirping as if nothing were amiss.

13th July 1915.

I have been up at the advanced dressing station since early morning to see how our fellows are faring for food and sleep, and to lend a hand with the wounded. I found the men all working with magnificent heart and will. Begrimed they were and fagged out with their ceaseless and anxious work, but they had never a murmur or complaint. They were out to do their task to their

utmost, and an inspiring task it is. The poor fellows were seeing sights that this world, with all its madness, can show only on rare occasions. They were seeing limbs shattered beyond repair, and caked with blood and mud. They were seeing gashes that shrapnel or shell had torn in the bodies of their fellow-creatures, till even the practised eye could scarce recognise the original parts. They were seeing long lines of livid forms pass on stretchers that were as likely to be dead as living by the time the dressing station was reached. Many were breathing their last. Even the eye unused to death could see that. They were seeing all these things for the first time, and yet there was no sign on their faces, as I scanned them anxiously on my way up towards the trenches, of panic or fear at the horrible thing they had come to meet, but only a look of grim determination and resolute self-control.

I knew the fellows well before, and I expected it, but I felt, and feel now as I write, a great sense of pride in them. The sterner types were toiling away in the scorching sun with their tunics off and their sleeves turned up, with nothing but their duty to exalt them. The gentler types were stopping every now and then in their task to speak a word of cheer or comfort to their wounded brother, or, with a smile, to re-adjust his wounded limb or offer a drop of water to moisten his parched lips, for thirst is a symptom almost as trying as pain.

The medical officers at the dressing station are working at their gruesome job continuously, with a break now and then for a sleep or a drink of tea. Tea without milk and slightly sweetened is what one lives chiefly on here. Often it is the only thing you can get, and right welcome it is at any time.

War is a strange thing. On the one side you have all the signs of excessive hate and unbridled passion that show the innate madness that still lurks in the human soul. On the other you have all the signs of unselfish devotion and kindness of spirit, even towards the man whom you have just struck in your hate, that show that there is, somewhere, a reserve of saving grace that rescues mankind from utter degradation. All in all it is a horrible jumble of inconsistencies. Meanwhile, let us cling fast to the better spirit in us. We want it all. Thank God that our task here is one of mercy and not of destruction. The realisation of the horrors and sordidness of it all is impossible till you are amongst the groans of the dying and the agonies of those that were better dead.



I have truly seen some inspiring sights. I saw an A. and S. officer with a shattered thigh whose chief concern, as he lay stretched on the table, was that his men would be well supplied with water, as the day was hot. He was carried out with a smile of absolute resignation on his face, and his last words to us were of gratitude for what had been done for him. He was very seriously hit, poor chap, and up there we could do very little for such as he. I was badly upset for a time over one of our own poor chaps. He was hit, mortally, I fear, close to where we were. I had at the moment no time to look after him, and by the time I was free he had been patched up and sent along the line. I fear it is hopeless. The officers are all well and cheerful so far, thank heaven.

15th July 1915.

Have been hard at it since I wrote last. I got back last night and have just had a sleep, wash, and shave, and am off again. Things are quieter now, but we have had two days of Hell. Our poor fellows have been badly hit—killed and I don't yet know how many wounded, the whole business happening just in front of one's nose.

16th July 1915.

These last four days—Monday, 12th, to Thursday, 15th—were days of awful strain and anxiety for us all. I shall never forget Monday afternoon, when the affair reached a climax. The din became incessant, and air and earth were shaken and torn in an inferno of hate and destruction. . . .

Our bearers have worked with tremendous spirit, and under circumstances of terrible hardship and strain, for, once the casualties started, it was one unending stream. We placed them in relays between two advanced dressing stations. Three of our officers lent a hand at the front and another helped at the back one. My duty was directed between the two, and a general supervision of the working of our own men, especially seeing that they were fed and rested sufficiently.

Great credit is due to everyone for the way the work was carried out, and our unit has been congratulated this morning for its services. Congratulations mean little to anyone after an experience like that. The best reward is the sense of duty done.

The officers worked with a will, and spared themselves nothing whilst the stress was at its greatest. Sleep was impossible, or only

to be had in short snatches of exhaustion for a couple of days and nights. The intense concentration demanded, with plentiful supplies of tea, carried them safely through. "Tea, tea, tea." That is the cry as the perspiration rolls from one and soaks right through every garment after hours of toil under the broiling sun.

The medical arrangements are as follows:—

Starting at the trenches each battalion has its regimental medical officer. The sick report to him every morning, or, in the case of an emergency, during the day. During an action the wounded are carried to him by the regimental stretcher-bearers. The work of the bearers is very strenuous when the casualties are very heavy, and they are exposed to all the dangers of the front line trenches. It is therefore not surprising that they often suffer heavily themselves. When a big affair is on, they toil day and night between the trenches and the regimental aid-post, where the doctor and his orderlies wait beside their medical stores and dressings to attend to the wounded before they are sent further down the line.

The regimental bearers are themselves trained in first aid, and whenever they observe a wounded man they apply the first field dressing, which every soldier carries fixed inside the tab of his coat. When the losses are heavy the soldier has to depend on his neighbour to render first aid, and every soldier is instructed in the use of the field dressing. The wound is exposed in the quickest way possible and the dressing is rapidly tied on. It prevents unnecessary infection whilst the man has to wait his turn for removal to the doctor.

Not infrequently when there is no one near to lend a hand the wounded man has to apply the dressing for himself. We saw a man the other day who had a very severe fracture of both bones of his leg. He cut up his trousers, pushed the fragments of bone that were sticking out back into their position as far as he knew how, and then fixed on his dressing. This is a type that one sees fairly often—the man who won't kill. We had another such who passed through our hands some time ago after a big action. He had a large hole in his back, which he must have got far in front of his fellows, for he lay out for a considerable time. An ordinary man would have lain out for ever. He had the spirit that brushes death itself aside. He crawled till, as he said, he fell asleep, and crawled again whenever the din grew louder and he awakened. We knew that it was no natural sleep that had

arrested his gasping efforts, but the collapse of exhaustion, and hæmorrhage.

These men have more than the mere animal will to live. Through it all their hearts remain smiling and they make others smile too. They are carried on their rude bed of pain and exhaustion into a place that has kept company for many weary hours with the tortured body and with death itself, and the walls of earth and the roof of wood and sand became radiant with a new spirit. The heavy-hearted catch up the cheerful strain. Suffering would almost seem to be a joy. And no one knows exactly how it has all happened, least of all the heroic and simple spirit that itself lies prostrate and yet laughs in the face of death. Their greatness is all unconscious, and is only great because it is so. The doctor's smile and word of cheer and encouragement seem puny and irrelevant before such a thing as this. The smile and encouragement have found a thing immeasurably greater than themselves, and they remain the better for the discovery.

When the regimental stretcher-bearers pick up a wounded man they carry him to the regimental aid-post. This is close behind the firing line, and is simply a hole extending from the main communication trench, with ledges cut for the doctor and his assistants, and any patients who are there, to sit or lie on. Round about are arrayed the medical and surgical panniers that are thrown open ready for use when an action is on.

It is imperative that the doctor be at some spot which all the officers and men belonging to his unit know, and to which the slightly wounded can walk and the severely wounded can be carried. This arrangement is necessary, as it is impossible for the medical officer to do good work in the firing trenches themselves that are scattered and cramped. The work done at the regimental aid-post is always carried out under grave risks, and the losses amongst medical men, who have died at their duty, have occurred largely at these places. During an action the shells and bullets may be falling like hail, and yet there is never a lull in the work of mercy.

The patients sit or lie round waiting their turn. Every now and then the bearers squeeze along the narrow trench leading to the doctor's place carrying a man whose grave condition demands immediate attention. The doctor turns aside from the broken legs and arms and bends over the prostrate figure, his assistants deftly cutting the clothes here and there till the wound is properly exposed, and then after a few skilful touches, during which perhaps

a tourniquet is applied to stem the red gush that carries life away with it, the gauze, wool, and bandage are placed into position. A ticket or "tally" with a red edge is torn from the book, the man's regiment, number, name, wound, and treatment quickly jotted down, and then the tally is fixed to the button of the tunic for the guidance of those farther down the line. The red edge denotes "danger," and that man will receive first attention wherever he may be.

The doctor turns again to the patients whose needs had to give way before the greater danger, and one by one their wounds are bathed and dressed, and they are carried off by the bearers waiting near, or they are directed to walk if their wounds are only trivial. If they require a helping hand, a bearer not engaged at the moment with a stretcher is always there to aid them on their way. Before sending them off the medical officer makes out the ordinary or white tally for each, and they pass on, carrying the label fixed over the breast that marks, better than any medal will ever do, that they have fought and suffered in their country's cause.

If you are to picture the scene at the medical aid-post during an action, as indeed at all the more advanced places of medical treatment, you must realise the awful circumstances of the time. The air is torn with the din and crash of the heavy guns that belch forth destruction on all sides, and with the constant crackle of the rifles and machine guns. The bullets fly past with a hiss and a hum. As the shells cross a hollow in the ground the sound of their flight gathers volume into a roar, that is prolonged long after they have passed overhead. It is as if a thunder-storm had burst forth at your very ears, louder and more furious than earth has ever known, and that seems as if it would never cease.

Every now and then the doctor and those around him stand for a moment listening intently, and then duck suddenly as a shell tears past with a scream and falls a few yards off, shattering everything in its course. A few seconds later, perhaps without a trace of warning, there is a terrific crash overhead, as if the storm had concentrated all its fury for one supreme moment. The shrapnel spatters the parapet and the trench with its deadly charge, and the doctor turns again to his work of grace. He feels a sharp twinge in his arm, where a maze of earth has struck him, but that is nothing and his work is pressing. The man on the ledge before him, whose hand he has just finished dressing, sits for a moment gazing vacantly at the opposite



wall, and then rolls over heavily with a bullet through his brain. He is carried out gently, and it is then seen that the same shrapnel charge has found two of the other patients, who by this time have begun to crowd round the doctor's trench waiting their turn.

The bathing, dressing, and bandaging commence again through it all. They must all be sent off down the line as fast as possible. The doctor and his orderlies swab, and cut, and snip, and tie, until the crush is well-nigh over.

The doctor's arm has been paining, but there was no time for it, with so many that must be dressed and passed on, waiting by. His orderly has seen the blood oozing through his shirt and running down his arm, but there is blood everywhere, and who minds blood on such a day? With the lull that leaves a gap for thought the doctor wonders if a lump of earth could really cause so much pain, and there is a stream of blood trickling down after all. He knows now, with a feeling akin to annoyance, that he must have a dressing and bandage round his arm and join the throng that is passing on down the line, with a tally fixed on his breast. The bullet has gone right through the back of the arm, and he knows the dangers and the dreary prospect before him. He has been cheery from the beginning and his cheerfulness soon returns. He makes the necessary arrangements, goes to see about a man to carry on his work, and at length takes his place in the line that is thinning down with the evening.

I know that man well,\* and saw him two months later on his way back to the line. He was sorry about the delays that had kept him away so long, and he went off with an agile and happy step to the front, where his men had again taken their places. I think he is one of those men who do not know personal fear, and whose sense of duty is always a keen, boyish pleasure. It may be otherwise. It may be that acute sympathy is combined with a timid heart, as is often so, but the hard needs of duty have ruled down the fear in his breast, which is known only to himself. Which is the better? It is not easy to say. There must be many of both at this time toiling unflinchingly and unselfishly for their country.

We must again join the procession of the maimed and the dying on their course along the line. From the moment when they leave the regimental medical officer they are taken under

\* Captain E. D. Gairdner, D.S.O. (and bar), Croix de Guerre, R.A.M.C. (T.), Medical Officer, 1/5th R.S.F.

the care of the field ambulance. The regimental bearers carry the patient to the aid-post, and the bearers belonging to the field ambulance take him over when the doctor there has dressed his wound.

Our function starts here. The first relay of bearers carries him or supports him, if he is able to walk, for a quarter of a mile or so along the trench, where the second relay takes him over. Another quarter of a mile and the third relay takes over the charge, and, in our case, these last bearers see him as far as the advanced dressing station, another half mile or thereabout. Here there are doctors and dressers working continually night and day while there is work to be done. During an action the work may be constant for days, but even during times of quiet there are always cases passing through—sick men and men wounded by the bullets and shells that fall in the trenches at any time of the night or day.

#### IV. THE ADVANCED DRESSING STATIONS ON ACHI BABA.

On the 13th August we took over the evacuation of the sick and wounded along the line of the Achi Baba Nullah. Our bearers work backwards from the regimental aid-posts in the trenches to the Wholly Cross advanced dressing station. Stretcher cases have to be carried the whole way.

The advanced station is far enough back to allow of surgical treatment being carried out with a certain degree of comfort. But a mile or less is not of much consequence in these days of war. During the heat of an action it is only a little less storm-tossed. If anything, the noise is greater, for we are nearer the guns that blaze and crash on every side, and, being on the main line of trench, the ground all round is frequently searched by the enemy's shrapnel. There is hardly a moment when stray bullets may not be heard whizzing past, to lodge in the scrub-grown bank opposite, or to strike the road that runs in front. When they land they give a sharp dull thud, and a fine cloud of sand rises to mark the spot.

The bearers who ply to and from the dressing stations have a task beset with dangers, and, as must happen, a gap is every now and then made in their ranks. We had many such amongst our own men during the last severe action. They tramped the trenches during three weary, blazing days, and they tramped them during the warm nights whilst the stress was at its height,



bearing down the wounded that still kept coming in. They carried on the stream of men that had to be dressed and passed on, and when they fell they were swept into the stream and were passed on themselves.

The Whally Cross dressing station lies in a gully or nullah that runs across the country for a considerable distance. There is a space here of a few hundred yards where the trench is absent. It is carried on by a narrow track that is protected on the danger side by the bank. This has been undermined in places to make dug-outs in which the passenger can crouch when the rifle- or shrapnel-fire is falling thickly, and it has been raised in places, where it is too low to afford cover, by means of loose earth that has been thrown up to form a parapet. Farther down, the track again passes into the trench. Along its side an extremely dirty stream trickles, and notice-boards warn the passer-by against using the water for drinking or even washing. It is infested by frogs, as indeed are all swamps and streams in the place. On a quiet evening their jarring croak fills in the intervals between the outbursts of rifle-fire.

The station stands just within the sheltered bank of the nullah, in a spot admirably suited for the purpose. The ground rises not too steeply for about twenty feet or so, and when you stand on the track and face the bank you are looking right back along the line of fire.

The man who set out first to raise his Red Cross flag in this region must have seen that this was the very place for him. It was an easy matter for him to dig the bank away to form an entrance. You then mount a step into the dressing-room, a hole about two yards square, dug into the bank and covered by some corrugated sheeting supported on wooden beams. Boxes and panniers lie round the sides, a plank is laid across behind by way of seat, and coats, haversacks, and water-bottles hang round the walls on nails driven into the wood. Beside it, to the right, you mount by half a dozen rude steps to a narrow dug-out where the medical officer sits and sleeps. Then behind these you have a whole host of dug-outs lying just under the upper edge of the bank. To the left there is another dressing-room where there is more room and where urgent operations are done. Next to it is a broad dug-out for urgent cases that require some hours of rest and treatment before you dare send them farther down the line. Then you have the holes where the other officers and men sleep.

It is all very primitive, but it is a very fascinating place. It

has stood the storm and stress of several months. Its wooden beams have been drilled and grooved and splintered with shrapnel and rifle bullets. A high explosive shell burst through the roof of the patients' room the other night. It shook the sergeant who was in it pretty badly, but that was all.

I could tell you tragedies of the road that runs by that would horrify you, though they have long ceased to horrify us. It is a place of tragedy, and yet we like its simple shelter of wood and earth. The last men lived and worked there night and day, through quiet and storm, for several months, and they were loath to leave when we came to turn them out.

It is a haven on the road for those whose task is bearing them down, and they come in for a little rest and comfort. A sapper came in to-day, overcome with the heat and the unpleasantness of a new job he had on at the front trenches. He sat and talked and drank tea, and went away feeling better. He talked of the fine Scotch fellows he had seen lying up there, though he did not know I was Scotch. The other day a man came in on his way up to the front line to find his brother who had fallen two days before. He was strong and collected as he went off. But his task proved hopeless.

As you sit in the dressing-room and look out between the wooden props that form the door you may watch the regiments passing from or to the trenches. As they pass in single file down to the rest camp you can see, showing through all the dirt and weariness of their days in the front line, a feeling of relief at the prospect of quieter days and nights. Those that pass up swing along with their heavy kit and rifle and spades, tired already with the heat, but apparently regardless of the dangers they are going to meet, although they are no strangers to the life of the front line trench. It makes little difference if the Turks have spotted them lower down and follow the thin line as it passes up with a rain of shrapnel. They have had this experience often before, and they continue on their way with a healthy indifference to danger.

If you climb a few steps leading from the dusty track, and when half-way up the bank you turn sharply to the left for a hundred yards or so, you come to our little cemetery. It has steadily grown until, when we took it over, there were about sixty mounds with their humble wooden crosses with the names of those who have been called away from the noise and crash of the fight written across firmly in indelible pencil. Like everything else, it is all very primitive. A few of the man's company come down with

their spades, and the parson conducts a simple burial service. There is little time for sentiment or regret. Two of our own men lie there. Their place is marked with a simple wooden stick, but we hope soon to have two crosses, which a joiner and a wood-carver amongst our fellows are making.

The cemetery stands in an open piece of ground. The extra height of bank which shelters the dressing station disappears just before you reach it, and it thus stands on the top of the ordinary low embankment that runs along the danger side of the track below. It is not always safe to visit the cemetery, and accidents have happened whilst a burial was in progress, for it has nothing to shield it from the hill that rises slowly to the right, where the entrenched armies face one another. Everything is quiet just now, but you see the fresh bullets lying where they have struck the mounds overnight, and even the wooden crosses are not saved from the storm that breaks with the dark. It is a place exposed to all the noise and clank of the fight, but the tempest's fury only serves to accentuate the peace of those below. It is a true soldier's burial-place.

In the early morning, before the haze of mist and sand has settled over everything, you will find a pleasing view from this flat piece of ground. In front, there is the gently undulating slopes of hill rising ultimately to the summit that so far has defied all attempts at conquest. It is a peaceful scene, with its green growth of scrub and tree, and yet it is fresh from some of the fiercest fights of history. Two big armies are there in front of us, gathering strength for the final blow, and yet there is not a sign of movement. There is nothing to mark the subterranean city of the gathered hosts except the brown lines of earth, one behind the other, that show where the trenches stretch across the hill.

Close at hand, a few hundred yards along the track that passes by us and that carries on the communication trench, there is a well—Romano Well—that gives the coldest and purest water on the Peninsula. So the soldier will tell you. It is a favourite spot. It is also well known to the Turk, and he every now and then sends a shower of shrapnel amongst the men who gather round waiting their turn. Many a man has lost his life while in pursuit of a cooling drink, and it has now a sinister reputation. Its water, however, is still as favoured as ever.

If you turn and look across the track that passes a few feet underneath you, you see the opposite bank rising to a broad, flat stretch of ground covered with a dark green shrub and some

trees. Beyond this the ground rises steeply to a height of 150 ft. or so. Down to the left the track runs along the nullah, and a mile or so farther on this opens out on to the Hellespont, with its strait of dark blue water intervening between us and Asia Minor. Beyond the Hellespont and the coast of Asia, some miles inland, but still only a short distance away, we look along the plain of Troy.

This little station of ours has woven itself closely into the spirit of war. It has seen and shared its horror and tragedy, its noise and danger, its exaltation and inspiration. It is on the direct line of things, and it knows the reality with a very intimate knowledge. There is none of the flare of the trumpet nor the beating of the drums here. There is none of the glamour of the dispatch. We leave that to the commander and the journalist and those at home. We only know the grim spectre that walks this countryside and that lays his hand with a destroying touch on the manhood of our race. We see the suffering and the death that are his work, and when we pause to think, which we rarely do, we see behind it all the tears and anguish of a sorrowing nation. But the spectre of war is too near to us for his terror to remain long amongst us. The horrors of the time have dulled our sensibility, and it is well that it should be so. We have occasional spells of vision, when we see through all the travail of these mad times the birth of better things. But our imagination is for the most part dull, and a drab determination carries us on our way.

Just now this nullah station has little to disturb its peace during the day. When big things are going on in front, as during the 12th, 13th, and 14th July, it is the centre of a busy traffic.

On such a day there is a continual coming and going. The wounded are brought down from the regimental aid-posts, and in a majority of cases their wounds are dressed with more attention to modern surgical needs than is possible further forward. The bearers leave them lying outside on the track under shelter of the bank, and they are brought in for treatment one after the other. If they are very seriously hit, they may be taken to the dug-out up the hill behind for observation. If not, other stretcher squads take them over and carry them on the next lap of their backward journey.

We have passed not a few wounded Turks through our hands. Most of them are big fellows, large-limbed and broad-backed. Truly a dangerous enemy. They receive exactly the same treat-



ment as our own fellows, and they have a pleasing way of exhibiting their gratitude for the unexpected kindness shown them. One big man positively beamed thanks when one of our bearers gave him a cigarette and lit it for him. For them, as for our own men, their greatest solace at such a time of pain is a cigarette clasped between their lips. They are dirty and ill-kempt, as is every man who has been long in the trenches. They are often hungry and thirsty, and it is amusing to see them making friends with a thick piece of bread and jam, as I have often seen. Their trench fare is apparently very simple. In their haversack you will find only a piece of black bread and onion. They are mostly well-clothed. One man had the most beautiful underwear I have ever seen on a man. He must have been of good social position, and it was obvious that his needs had been the subject of fond care on the part of those he had left at home. Round their waist they all wear a broad band several yards long, and it is a matter of no slight difficulty unrolling it as they lie on the stretcher.

This little station is on the direct line of news, and we get early first-hand information of what is going on in front. Every man has his story to relate. You must first learn, of course, how he himself was hit, how he had just climbed the parapet for the charge, when he was nailed by the machine gun, or he had just reached the Turkish trench where they were four-deep, or he was forward in the bombing-trench or he was got by a sniper, when going along one of the saps. They will then tell you how the fight progresses, but you soon learn to discount their story, for the field is big and their view of it small. It is not till the following day that the reliable news leaks out.

During the days of stress you may see a thousand or more cases in twenty-four hours. It means hard, constant toil, with an hour or two snatched for sleep. But there is a satisfaction and inspiration about it that keep fatigue at a distance, for it cannot last long, and in a few days the lull comes, when you can indulge your tired eyes and mind and back. This feeling pervades all ranks. We have to make arrangements, of course, for regular reliefs, but I have learned afterwards that some of our bearers have toiled almost incessantly for forty-eight hours. They would not be stopped by their sergeants. They all worked well, and we had great difficulty in picking out any for special mention. But we decided on one man who had worked nearly without stop at carrying patients during almost constant shell- and rifle-fire for forty-eight hours when he himself, a great part of the time,

was carrying a wound through the leg. It was, of course, superficial, but the deed showed at once the nobility and the staying-power of the man. He was recommended for the D.C.M., and he got it. I am glad to say, also, that it was a very popular honour amongst us.

After the patient leaves our station of the nullah he is carried down the track under shelter of the bank for a quarter mile or so, where another squad takes him over. Just close to the place of exchange the bank drops down flush with the track. Here there is nothing to shelter you from the bullets that ping past in their hundreds on a busy day and that you hear any night. It is a veritable death-trap, and you are wise to hurry past as quickly as you can. This place is called Backhouse Post. A few yards farther on the track is continued into a deep trench, and this you only have to leave once, where a road crosses, before you arrive at the next station, about a half a mile farther on.

Just now this station is a haven of peace, where you can rest for a moment on your way up the nullah. When there is a rush of work it is the site of busy treatment. When the cases gather more quickly at the nullah station than the staff can cope with the overflow are brought right on here. It is a simple little place nestling at the foot of a small hill. We call it Skew Bridge station, because of the bridge of planks crossing the stream that trickles down the nullah, and that flows to the sea near by. The shelter is primitive, and consists of a roof of sand bags supported on wood and set up against a wall of earth that stands 10 or 12 ft. high. Near by there are dug-outs cut out of the earth that do for sleeping and for sheltering any patients who are waiting to be sent off down the line. Behind, they have recently made a bigger dug-out, with a profusion of sand bags, that does for the medical officer.

It is an attractive place to work at. It has less shelter than the upper station, and when you stand at the entrance you look, beyond some hundreds of yards of sandy, scrub-grown ground occupied by the French, straight across Morto Bay, where the blue waters of the Dardanelles dip deep into the Peninsula. Beyond the Dardanelles you see the coast of Asia, flat in front and rising in steep cliffs to the left. It looks quite near, and yet it is some miles distant. Beyond it the mountains of Asia show purple in the distance. The exposure on this side means that there is nothing to protect the station from the Asiatic guns. The other day, when we were sitting having tea, a piece of armour-



piercing shell, 1 ft. long and 2 ins. thick, came whizzing into the station.

The station lies at the foot of the nullah. On the left you see the high land that forms the continuation of the hill along the southern side of the nullah falling abruptly into the sea at Morto Bay. At its extremity, where it juts into the sea, there is the battered remnants of a fort. On the near or seaward side the French have taken advantage of the admirable shelter for the construction of the largest, the most artistic, and, at the same time, probably the most efficient dug-outs on the Peninsula. To the right of the flat, sandy stretch that runs in front of the station right into Morto Bay, the ground rises again in a ridge that extends close to and parallel to the shore for half a mile or so, where it falls fairly steeply, just beyond Sedd-el-Bahr, into V Beach, the site of the historic landing from the *River Clyde*. This ridge is perhaps 200 ft. high. It is dotted over with trees, and it affords excellent shelter for heavy guns.

The Skew Bridge dressing station lies on low ground, and, while it is out of sight of the hill and the front line trenches, it is by no means immune from the shells and bullets that come from that direction. The proximity of a large number of artillery batteries, that hug the admirable shelter the region affords, brings about our ears shrapnel and high explosive when the Turks' stores can spare them.

In the evenings, also, and especially when there is any serious action on in front, when the danger may be as great during the day as at night, it is a favourite site for falling bullets. Many a man has been hit about here on his way back to his rest camp when he had thought that he had left rifle-fire at a safe distance behind. One morning a patient with a bullet in the abdomen had just been carried from the dug-out, where he had been under observation for twenty-four hours, down to the ambulance waggon for removal to the shore, when a bullet came into the waggon and went right through his arm, as he lay on the stretcher. It must have passed between the two bearers who were still bending over him. The poor fellow had to be carried back again to have his arm attended to. Truly the fates dog some men with most relentless step! The same morning an Australian officer was standing in front of our dressing-room examining an old water-bottle, when a bullet struck the bottle and fell inside. As a matter of fact, many of the bullets that fall here are spent, or nearly so, though not so far spent that they cannot pierce flesh and bone.

This station of Skew Bridge is the farthest point to which ambulance waggons can be taken, and, as a matter of fact, it was formed as the rendezvous to which the patients could be brought to meet the waggons. It is little else than that just now, though on a big day its functions are much more serious and strenuous. I have seen a large crowd of men sitting or lying about outside waiting their turn, although the waggons were being loaded to the full as they arrived in quick succession. I have seen such a crush of work during the night that the whole of the available ground in front has been littered with the wounded, and you had to face the task of sorting out the slight from the serious cases and the dying with the dim light of a lantern. A weird and memorable sight it is, this ministration of the night.

Under the roof of sand bags there is the medical officer and his orderly assistants busy snipping and bathing and tying, or injecting the God-given serum that holds off the spectre of tetanus. Outside, the orderlies pass hither and thither amongst the patients, with their lamps, discovering the red tallies, for they must have first attention and first place in the ambulance. At another place you can dimly see the padre bending over a stretcher and lifting the man's head whilst he sips his cup of water, or he is speaking some words of comfort to the man whose last account with this world is nearly closed.

Nowadays that is all past, and one motor ambulance waggon does all the work. It is kept here, and it takes down the patients as they arrive to the field ambulance a mile or so farther on. It is a Napier car, with a fine, sturdy body, and it requires it, for I doubt if you will find a worse road for a motor car anywhere. It is nothing but a track of ruts and holes, on which, in previous times, probably nothing but the lightest vehicles were ever risked for the journey up the nullah. In these days, of course, its defects of nature have been greatly amplified by the large number of shells that have torn it up at odd times. The car has come through it all with nothing worse than a broken spring. Taking it over the road in the dark, with lights showing neither on road nor car, is a feat of driving, but it is a feat that has been performed many times without mishap. The drivers, a fresh, healthy, clean-limbed pair, with a strong Lancashire accent, obviously find great happiness in their work.

The road twists about for a bit over very broken ground, and then turns round on the north side of the ridge that spans the south shore. It then runs straight into the open ground that

forms the tip of the Peninsula. This open space, about 2 miles across in each direction, is scooped out like a shallow spoon, so that, if you start from the centre, you have to climb in any direction you decide to go. On the north and west sides you mount by fairly gentle slopes to the cliffs that overhang the shore. These slopes were the scene of fierce fighting during the days of late April and early May, when the battered division, which had moved its way through almost unheard-of slaughter and obstacles to the shore, at last began to get a foothold on the higher land.

On the south you scale the ridge dotted with olive and fig, and, just on the other side, standing about 100 ft. or so above the shore, you see the long village of Sedd-el-Bahr, once a place of beauty and happiness, now a mass of broken walls and loose stones. Underneath there is the long thin sheet of purest blue of the Dardanelles, and, beyond, the outstretched Continent of Asia Minor, whose ever-changing colours and long deep valleys of shadow and romance beckon with an appeal that is not for these times.

The basin along which the broken road passes is dusty and barren, and trenched beyond any recognition of its former self. A few months back, when our men first arrived, it was a smiling land of blossom and vine. There is scarcely a trace of building anywhere, for the husbandman prefers to have his house in the society of the village. Should his toil keep him in the fields, there is always the shade of the orchard during the day's heat, and at night what could be better than the warm earth for bed, with the starlight dome above? It is all gone. The hand of war has laid its ravaging touch everywhere. The countryman has been driven from the ground that he nursed in simple contentment, and that he loved better than anything else on earth. He has been forced into a fight that he never chose, and that he probably only dimly understands. His orchards have fallen into waste, and where before there was plenty, there is now nothing but parapet and trench in endless succession. The gods of ancient Greece in all their wrath never ravaged the land so ruthlessly as this modern god of war with his western myrmidons.

Our main dressing station, to which the cases are carried, stands in the open, just where the farther side of the basin begins to rise in a gentle slope to the cliffs. It is three-quarters of a mile or thereby from the shore.

This station has gradually grown, till now it provides accommodation for quite a large number of patients. It is all dug

beneath the ground level, a series of spreading trenches, with offshoots for the various departments of a hospital.

From this station the cases are transferred by motor car to the casualty clearing station on W Beach, where they are transferred by trawler or barge to the hospital ship that rides at anchor a mile from the shore. The beach is a sinister place, for it is raked night and day by the guns on Achi Baba and the Asiatic shore opposite, and the patients do not like to linger long within the casualty clearing station, for there is no shelter there save canvas tents. There are many tragic stories of men who were gathered there waiting their removal to the Red Cross ship, and for whom vistas of the comfort of a base hospital or even home had already opened before their eyes.

#### V. MEMORIES OF CAPE HELLES.

For some time after the eventful days in the middle of July things remained quiet, though desultory fighting and increasing sickness kept us busy in the ambulance. But in the early days of August rumour, that so often precedes big things, began to be whispered about from lip to lip. We soon learnt that we were going to make another bid for victory, and our spirits revived with new hope.

On the 6th August we heard officially of the intended landing further up the coast, which it was hoped would bring us to our goal. There was a stir in our midst, and already in spirit we found ourselves marching up the slopes of Achi Baba hot-foot after a routed enemy, across the "few miles of scrub" that stood between us and victory. Within a short time the Straits would be open, and the British Navy would be hammering at the gates of Constantinople. But it was not to be. Our bounding spirits outleapt our sober judgment.

Looking back on it, this seems to us the greatest disappointment we have ever had. It was not till some time after, however, towards the winter months, that the full force of our unenviable plight gradually dawned upon us. And then, I remember, we used to wonder and guess what fate had in store. The pessimist was ever abroad selling his dismal wares, but to our credit be it said that as a whole the attitude that prevailed was one of determined if not cheerful optimism. There were factors, other than the purely military, which tinged our feelings. The chief of these was sickness.

Coincidentally with the landing at Suvla, a strong demonstra-



tion was made from our side of Achi Baba. We can remember, on the afternoon of 6th August, the vigorous bombardment of the Turkish trenches in front of the village of Krithia, in which guns from the sea largely participated. And then in memory we can still see the long lines of our boys with the tin plates on their backs glistening in the sun as they clambered up the slopes of Achi Baba towards Krithia. The Turk counter-attacked that night, and again on the following night—the 7th August. On this latter occasion flares went up along the whole line, and the noise of bursting shrapnel and the crackle of rifles and machine guns was so great that for a time it seemed as if the Turk had gathered up all his force and was bearing down in an irresistible wave on our position, and that before long we could scarcely escape being driven into the sea. But within a short time the whole line was quiet again.

On the 9th August we at last received news regarding the doings on the other side of Achi Baba. It was good. Sari Bair ridge was taken, and the new landing troops were in touch with the Anzacs. But this was the last satisfactory news we ever received, and it soon became evident to us that our dreams of victory were not yet to be realised.

From this time to the end there was no fighting on a big scale, though there were repeated smaller attacks in which for the time being we found ourselves busily employed in the ambulance. The campaign settled down definitely into fighting between two entrenched armies, with all that that means.

To many of us the memory of our life in these days is haunted by the spectre of sickness which seized hold of the Army early, and maintained its grip throughout the whole campaign. Few there were who escaped altogether. The young athlete was marked down just as surely as those of less robust vigour. Disease, when once it enters an army, is prone to spread through all ranks without discrimination.

So it was with us. To many the time spent on Gallipoli stands for a six months' constant battle against fever and malaise. Many succumbed early. Many were stricken late. Some braved it out, and of these not a few will carry the effects on their frame to the end.

Our chief enemy was dysentery in its varied forms. It gripped us early, and during the summer and autumn months it took a heavy toll. None of us can ever forget the horror of the scourge as it held us in its claws during these hot, broiling

months. Least of all, I imagine, can we ever forget it who, suffering often ourselves, had to hide our pains in our effort to minister to others more needy.

A great deal has been spoken and written about the dysentery of Gallipoli. Scientists are still arguing amongst themselves about the germ that caused it. And it is right, in the interests of our armies and of practical medicine, that the thing should be settled. We, who knew the reality, may be pardoned for looking on these discussions as a trifle academic. I doubt if any, except those who saw with their own eyes, can ever picture the tragedy of hundreds and thousands of brave, strong men battling in vain against a loathsome thing, whilst the flesh left their bodies and their strength ebbed away, till at last they were stretched out helpless as babes.

It is still too early to attempt to explain the various factors responsible for this condition of affairs. As guardians of the Army's health, the experience pressed heavily on us at the time, and has left us thinking deeply since. The ultimate explanation was, of course, easy—imperfect sanitation. We all learnt a lesson during these days of trial that we can never forget. The fire has burnt deeply into our hearts. We know that the lessons, learnt on that battlefield in front of Achi Baba, have served us constantly in our efforts since then. We know also that regulations, no matter how perfect in their scope, will fail to establish anything approaching perfection until the sanitary conscience of an army is thoroughly awakened. At that time we were young soldiers embarked on a campaign under eastern skies, and surrounded by circumstances that were as unfavourable as it is possible to imagine. Youth, inexperience, and environment were all against us.

Few of us escaped. At times dysentery and fever played a sorry havoc in the ranks of the ambulance. At one time we were working the whole ambulance, including dressing stations, with only two medical officers instead of nine, and one of these was just able to drag himself from bed when a patient was announced.

With the advent of the cooler weather and the rains in October things improved greatly, though it was about this time that a mysterious epidemic of jaundice claimed a large number of victims. The disease itself was not a severe one, and few died. Slight fever and pains, and then the yellow tinge, which, first starting in the whites of the eyes, rapidly overspread the whole body. The morning sick parades in these days were rarely without their little jaundiced procession.

Though it is true that the ardent spirits with which we had embarked for overseas service soon tamed down considerably under the trial and stress of war, there were nevertheless many things and incidents which added greatly to the pleasures of our life at that time.

As I have said, we were warned before we arrived that life was going to be a nightmare. And there is a popular idea persisting to the present day that the life we spent there was one long procession of gloom and misery. But it was not so; for, throughout, there was the opportunity of pleasing intercourse with your fellows. This constitutes one of the saving pleasures of Army life at all times. We had small dinner parties, in which the two other field ambulances of the division joined, and then there were the opportunities for friendship with the French troops, which we availed ourselves of.

On the 28th September the news of the French successes on the Western Front with the capture of twenty thousand prisoners reached us. This caused great jubilation, and at 7 o'clock that night one battery in each artillery group fired twenty-one rounds at a special object, amid cheers raised from all throats for our gallant French allies. It was a tremendous occasion for us. The sudden artillery outburst and the great volume of cheering that shook the silence of the night must have startled the Turk badly. He must have taken it for a general attack, for he loosed off the most vigorous fusillade of rifle and machine gun that we heard during the whole time we were on Helles.

On the 14th October we heard of the German advance on Serbia and of the fall of Belgrade. The imminence of our danger specially directed our thoughts to this piece of news.

It was just about this time that we evacuated three of our officers from sickness, including our commanding officer, Colonel Ross, all suffering from epidemic fevers. Some time after we heard with feelings of keen sorrow of the death of our beloved commanding officer.

There was little natural beauty about Helles itself, for the country, that must have looked well in its clothing of grass and flower in the early days of the campaign, by the time we arrived was barren to a degree.

But if you climbed the high land overhanging the northern shore towards X Beach, especially about sunfall, you would see the

islands of Imbros and Lemnos and Tenedos, with the shadows playing on their hills. Beyond Imbros you would catch a sight of the peaks of Samothrace, and further to the west you might get a glimpse of Mount Athos. Then, in the opposite direction, from your point of vantage you would get Achi Baba standing out full in his curious symmetry of central head and lateral shoulders sloping down on each side to the sea. Across the southern shoulder the cliffs of Chanak could be seen. Further to the right, across the Hellespont, could be seen the evening shadows gathering about the mountains and valleys of Asia Minor and the Plain of Troy.

The beauty of the evenings at Helles was sometimes very great, especially when the purple hues gathered on Achi Baba and crept across to the south. The air was then very clear, and distant objects on the sides of Achi Baba would stand out with surprising distinctness. We often then at one place could pick out with the naked eye the red crescent flag flying at a Turkish dressing station. During the time of twilight a quiet would fall, with nothing to disturb except the constant tiresome chirp of the cicada, the pathetic, half human and wholly diverting neigh or bray of the mules, with the big guns roaring on occasions to remind you of battle. Twilight and dawn were the quietest times of the day. It often seemed then as if by common consent a hush had fallen on the field of battle.

During the last months our advanced dressing stations moved about as our division moved from one flank to the other, but our main station remained in the same place throughout the whole campaign.

The later weeks consisted largely of a battle with the elements. Especially was this the case towards the middle of November, when we had a severe storm of wind and rain that washed us out, followed immediately by an intense frost that hit the men in the trenches severely, though we did not experience the same tragic results that befell the troops at Suvla at that time.

#### VI. THE EVACUATION OF CAPE HELLES.

It is difficult to say when the preparations for the evacuation of Helles really began. Suvla and Anzac had been evacuated. We knew that, and we wondered if our turn would follow. But on the 20th December an order circulated to all ranks for the time set all doubt aside. Helles was not to be abandoned. "To the



Eighth Army Corps was entrusted the duty of maintaining the honour of the British Empire against the Turk." We were exhorted to "make our positions impregnable, and while driving back every attack we must ever seek to make steady progress forward and maintain, both in spirit and action, that offensive which, as every soldier knew, alone leads to success in war." Reinforcements of artillery and increased supplies of ammunition had already arrived, and further troops would be available shortly.

We read those words with the spirit that animates all true soldiers—calm submission and determination to endure to the end.

Big guns arrived and were planted near Hunter Weston Hill. Reinforcements could be seen in the morning against the skyline as they climbed the hill from the beach where they had landed over-night. We could see them and the Turk could see them and he every now and then turned his guns in their direction.

But we soon saw that, whilst troops were certainly landing on the Peninsula, troops were at the same time leaving it, and before long it was evident to those who knew that men were leaving more rapidly than new troops arrived. It was soon apparent that something secret was afoot. Orders reached us that no case was to be kept in the ambulance unless he was calculated to get better in a day or two. No letters arrived, and there were many who waited in vain that Christmas for the home parcels which were to swell their meagre celebrations to some semblance of the days of peace.

Within a few days the extent of the preparations was so great that, whilst the Turk on the far hillsides of Achi Baba was kept in complete ignorance of the plans, no one in the neighbourhood of the beaches could any longer be deceived.

Eventually we received definite orders to prepare to evacuate. The Peninsula was to be emptied gradually, but every effort was to be made to maintain the ordinary routine appearance of things. Our camps were to be undisturbed and the evacuation of wounded and sick two or three times a day from advanced dressing to main dressing station was to continue whether there were patients or not. The patients naturally grew less as the troops dwindled in numbers, but dummies were to be used and the performance of loading and unloading the waggons was to go on as before.

A great deal of natural amusement was extracted from this theatrical show. The spirits of the men rose higher and higher each day as the hour of their deliverance drew nigh. They threw

themselves with zest into the construction of dummy water-carts and motor cars to replace those which were sent to the beach to be shipped. At that time we had one motor ambulance car. The chassis was sent off, whilst the hood was mounted on four wheels in the usual place by the hospital entrance.

It almost seemed as if the Turk had grown suspicious, for the roads round our camp were shelled more heavily than usual at night and the camp itself did not escape.

A few days before the end of the year we received orders to send off any officers or men who were in any way unfit. It was with great difficulty that any men could be induced to admit they had not felt better in all their lives. But a party was mustered and sent off under our old quartermaster. On New Year's Eve, whilst we were sitting at the evening meal, a hurried message came to send off one N.C.O. and twenty-five men within the hour. With a scramble the order was carried out. That same night the preliminary operation orders for the final day were received. On our ambulance, reinforced by the other two ambulances, was to be placed the task of attending to the medical arrangements of the division during the evacuation.

The general scheme was that, on the fateful day, bearers and nursing orderlies were to be provided with stretchers and dressings and placed along the route from the front lines, so that during the evacuation every party of fifty soldiers would be accompanied the whole way from trenches to boats by a squad of four R.A.M.C. men. To provide for any casualties in excess of the numbers which could thus be dealt with, additional stretchers were placed at known spots along the route so that the infantrymen would be able to lift their wounded mates along with them. The medical officers were stationed at definite intervals to attend to the wounded as they arose.

The route was arranged in every detail. From the front line it came down Leith Walk and Central Street, the Mule Trench, thence via Backhouse Post past Skew Bridge to the Rendezvous, a spot opposite our main camp about three-quarters of a mile from the shore. Thence it went by the shortest route to an improvised pier near V Beach which was selected for our evacuation. The route was to be policed throughout so that even the most stupid could not wander.

The evacuation was to be carried out gradually. Each line was to be thinned out in stages. There were to be eight control posts, No. 1 being in front, No. 8 at Skew Bridge about three miles

behind. The troops were to be counted and checked as they passed these points, and here the R.A.M.C. personnel were to be stationed. The evacuation was to be conducted in three trips during the night, separated by a two to three hours' interval.

Days of tense hard work now set in for us. On New Year's Day we received orders to send all the equipment and dressings which would not be required to a depôt near the beach. It was difficult to decide what our requirements would be, as we had had no previous experience of evacuations! But we worked with a will, loading our boxes and our panniers that New Year's night and carted them off to the depôt. A loading party under an officer stood by from the ambulance beside the equipment, but it was not loaded on board a trawler for two days. It was not till many days after that we again saw this loading party. Tossed about on the trawler "G. 8," backwards and forwards between Mudros, Gallipoli, and Tenedos, they had adventures which make the stories of our boyhood's heroes shrink and pale.

The preparations for the final day were pushed ahead. Men and horses and guns and stores of all descriptions were shipped away under cover of night, whilst during the day troops arrived in constant succession accompanied by guns and ammunition and all the things of war. To the Turk watching from Achi Baba and the coast of Asia it must have seemed that a host was gathering for a final vigorous assault.

Every detail required attention. Nothing was to be left to chance. Each man was to know his duty and his post. He learnt where he would join his "trip" and whether he was first, second, or third trip. Every officer and man wanted to be in the last trip, but this could not be. After consideration it was decided that the oldest hands would be given the post of honour, whilst the younger soldiers would leave the Peninsula first.

Then we recall the difficulty there was in arranging the packs and kit of the men so that they could move in perfect silence. The mess-tins and water-bottles were muffled and the feet were swathed in sandbags. The greatcoat was rolled and fixed so that each man would be free to carry a loaded stretcher.

An order that hurt us sorely we remember was received during these days. All run in possession was to be destroyed! The nights were cold and cheerless, and there had been no opportunity for the usual celebrations of the season. The order hurt, but it was obeyed to the letter.

At last the "day before" arrived. The morning of the 7th

January broke clear and cold with frost, and our luck seemed to be holding. Our preparations were nearing completion. We remember that morning at daylight receiving an order to despatch four mules and one man forthwith to the Beach. To us it had now become apparent that the naval people organising the evacuation at the Beach loaded up with the items to their hand, and if there was a spare corner on the ship to fill up before they started they sent a hurried message for a fragment of the ambulance!

During this day the Turk launched a big attack on the front to our left. There were still enough men in our trenches to oppose him with resistance, and any suspicion he may have had must have been allayed. It may have been as the result of this attack that he remained so quiet during the whole of the next day and night.

The eighth, the day of our fate, broke cold, with a stormy breeze blowing. We wondered if luck, which had smiled on us so far, was at last going to play us false, for a rough sea would damn our every chance. But we worked away at our final rehearsal. The bearers were sent to their control posts, close touch was maintained with the fragment of the Divisional Headquarters that was now left, so that our plans would be modified in accordance with any altered dispositions of the troops, the officers had a conference to discuss the final details, we synchronised our watches and the last trip of officers and men set off to their posts.

The last day will always stand out in memory as one of the greatest days of our life. As usually happens on such an occasion, every detail, however trifling, is fixed in imperishable relief against the background of momentous experience.

We remember that after we had thought that all details were finally settled, orders and wires still poured in from headquarters. Still they came, and if the Day of Judgment arrives before the war is ended the orderly room will assuredly be late in responding to the last trump. A series of orders were sent to us regarding the disposal of the horses that were still left on the Peninsula. It was evident that at headquarters there were two opposing influences at work, the one a love of horses and the desire to save them, the other a determination that come what might they must not be left to the Turk. The first order came early. All horses were to be shot at dark. An hour after this was cancelled. Horses were to be watered and fed before dark, and those not required for the ambulance waggons were to be liberated. A chit came hot on the top of this to say that an officer would call round during the



day to shoot all horses not required for the evacuation. The contest between the two camps was now becoming exciting to us who looked on, and when a later order arrived instructing that horses would not be liberated or shot, but would be left in their lines with plenty of water and feed, it was received with loud cheers. But from this jubilation we were soon plunged into despondency by the next order, the last of the series, to the effect that all horses not needed would be shot immediately after dusk. At dusk an officer was given a revolver and sent over to the horse lines to carry out the dire deed of execution. Now, R.A.M.C. revolvers are not always kept in the best of condition, and when he was asked some days later how his task had fared, he said, "Oh, I had to let them go. The confounded revolver would not work."

During the last two hours of the afternoon the First Trip and the Rendezvous parties were engaged in an orgy of wanton destruction. Dozens of tins of bully beef were punctured by a blow from a pick. Stoves, camp-kettles, galvanised iron roofing, tents, rubber thigh trench boots and anything which we could not take were all destroyed beyond use.

The First Trip party moved out to join the infantry who were to move off from the back areas at 6.30 p.m. The Rendezvous party alone was now left, and after lighting up the camp with candles which were due to burn out at 10 p.m. and which were placed in tents and dug-outs as if nothing were amiss, they set off to their posts leaving a camp forsaken but with all the semblance of life. All round the camp-fires burned as if there was nothing to disturb the ordinary routine of the night.

The Rendezvous was in telephonic connection with the eight posts all along the line and with the Beach, so that we knew at any moment how things were progressing both in front and behind. As we gazed into the dark, waiting for the First Trip, we watched four large French guns pass towards the Beach, each drawn by twelve pairs of fine horses. There was no fuss. They moved past us in a silence that was impressive. It was a noble sight.

The First Trip arrived to time. They were due at the Rendezvous at 7 p.m. and to embark at 8.30. The men were keen and anxious as they trooped past us. There was to be no smoking and no talk above a whisper, for the night was clear and lights would be visible for miles and the smallest noise travels far on such a night.

Just as we heard that the First Trip had been embarked safely the Second Trip arrived. In silence they were halted and

marshalled into fours and counted. When the complete party was collected they set off on the final stage of their journey.

Whilst the hearts of all beat anxiously during these hours that seemed to be prolonged to the length of days to those who waited in silence, the usual amount of night firing could be heard on the hillsides of Achi Baba. Occasional flares would rise lighting up the slopes far up in front, or a sudden burst of machine-gun fire would startle us into thinking that the Turk had spotted the game. But always the comforting report kept coming down the wires from the control posts: "Everything going well, no casualties reported." Once or twice we heard shells whizz overhead to the Beach, and we had momentary spells of tense anxiety, but the suspense lifted with the reassuring reports.

At one time, however, our anxiety reached an acute stage. The sea was running high and rising, and the embarking of the Second Trip was being carried out under grave difficulties. The prospects for a bit became extremely gloomy, and it almost looked as if dire disaster was pressing in to overwhelm us, and our plight was an unenviable one. We had destroyed all the rations except what we carried. The big guns had gone, all except a few old veteran pieces the last function of which was to burst into occasional fire that night. We should have been a sorry crowd if morning and the Turk still found us stranded on the Peninsula amid the desolation of our deserted camps and the havoc which we had wreaked on them with our own hands. Visions of Constantinople rose before our eyes. For a time Fate looked to have turned black against us at the last moment.

But just when our horizon seemed to have darkened to irretrievable disaster the welcome news was flashed back along the line that the Second Trip had been embarked at the Beach. We took a deep breath of renewed hope and peered anxiously out towards Achi Baba for the arrival of the last party.

At last No. 1 Control Post at the front line rang up to say he was cleared and was removing his instrument. A few minutes later No. 2 Post did the same, then No. 3. The excitement was now extreme. The stage of final crisis was on us. The next few minutes would decide our fate. In succession the remaining posts rang up to announce the passage of the last trip. No. 4, then No. 5, then No. 6, then No. 7, and finally No. 8 reported that all was well and that they were lifting their instruments.

Would our luck hold? There was now in front of us, between

us and the large Turkish Army on the slopes of Achi Baba, nothing but miles and miles of empty trenches with the parcel of men who had forsaken them pressing eagerly towards us. It would be half an hour before the first of this last batch would reach us.

Still the rifles crackled on the hillside and still our flares climbed into the skies at the far-off trenches as if everything were as usual. For the engineers had rigged up ingenious devices by which rifles and flare-pistols automatically discharged themselves long after their owners had left. By an accumulation of clever mimicry and dumb play the Turk was lulled that night into the belief that our lines were still firmly held against him. At the very moment when they were being completely emptied, for all we knew he may have been preparing to meet a gathering attack.

At last, just as the moon began to peer over the distant hills of Asia away beyond the Hellespont, our straining eyes picked out the first few men of the last batch. Their dour Scotch faces were set in a look of mingled determination and suspense as they approached. They had come miles through trench and over the open without a moment's pause, for this was not a night for dallying by the way. The sweat poured down their faces although the night was cold. As they gathered in front of us to be marshalled for the final count the excitement that animated them spread to us.

In a short time the "all correct" was announced, the Staff closed their office at the Rendezvous, and the procession turned its back on Achi Baba and made off for the Beach, the ambulance, or what was left of it, taking its usual position in the rear.

Everything had so far gone better than in our wildest hopes we could have wished for. The only casualty of the night was a man who carried a machine-gun and who in the unwonted bustle and exertion had developed a pain in the side and a palpitation that left him breathless. He was the only occupant of our ambulance waggons.

As we had a large reserve of stretchers, at the last moment, prompted by a laudable desire to help the British taxpayer, each man picked up two stretchers before he joined the procession.

The way to the Beach, which we had often marched and thought nothing of, seemed a very long trek that night. But we pushed on as quickly as the length of our procession and the darkness of the night would allow. The rifle bursts still broke the silence of the far-off slopes of Achi Baba, and the lights of

the flares still rose into the heavens. The Turk was still unsuspecting, though every now and then a gun from the Asiatic side of the Hellespont would hurl a shell over to the Beach near us.

Gradually our pace became slower as the head of the procession reached the narrow track that runs between the sea and the cliffs. In places it is only a yard or two wide and the column was by now a long one. At one time "Asiatic Annie" served us the last thrills which she was fated to do. We could by this time see the far coast of the Dardanelles showing distinctly in the moonlight. Every now and then we caught the flash of the large gun and then, eleven seconds afterwards, the shell burst with a shriek and a crash. It fell near us in the sea, but it was still thirty yards away. Our luck was still holding.

We marched past the *River Clyde*. With one last look at the famous old tattered liner we passed on. We continued our course past V Beach to the rocking, ramshackle wooden pier, and thence along the breakwater to where we could just make out in the darkness a torpedo boat destroyer tossing on the sea.

Here the delay seemed to be interminable, and "Asiatic Annie" was rousing herself into renewed activity. But we steeled our hearts to patience although it at one time looked as if daylight would still find us on the shores of Gallipoli. One by one the men scrambled on to the slippery rocking deck of the T.B.D. across the gangway steadied by stalwart bluejackets. Our gallant boys still clung heroically to their salved stretchers, but this was more than the sailors could stand. It was going to be a tight fit to get the men on board, and there was no room for odds and ends on the narrow deck, apart from the fact that every second of time was precious and it required the use of his every limb to enable a man to clamber aboard. A stentorian voice rang out "Chuck these ——— things away!" and it rained stretchers in the vicinity of that gangway till all the R.A.M.C. men were safely on board.

We slipped our moorings and were off. The moon was hidden behind storm clouds and we could see little of the shore as we bade good-bye to the land which had held us captive for these many months past. We were cold and sodden, for the seas broke over us as we huddled together on the deck. But we were happy as we breathed the breath of liberty once more after months of bondage. As we watched the searchlights in the Narrows grow more and more distant behind us, even the greatest discomforts of body and the buffeting of the elements could not rob us of the



relief we felt at the ending of our long chapter of trial. The sailors, with the proverbial cheery kindness of the sea, did their utmost to lighten the troubles of the passage. Within a few minutes every man who had not fallen into a sleep of exhaustion where he lay was served with a pannikin of steaming cocoa.

In the morning we reached Madros and here we stayed for a day or two picking up the fragments which had left the ambulance bit by bit during these last days of Helles. After a few days we were hustled on board a troopship and set sail for Alexandria, where we landed for the second time two days afterwards.

Thus ended the first chapter of our service overseas.

#### VII. BACK TO EGYPT.

After the evacuation we were sent back to Egypt, and for some time we were camped in the desert on the outskirts of Cairo.

Those were great days! Breathing freely again under the sense of relief from a heavy strain, it is not surprising that the spirit of holiday was abroad amongst us. Though the division had spent some days in Egypt the previous year, leave had not been open, and none of the officers or men had had a chance to explore the sights. The opportunity now opened up and was thoroughly taken advantage of. The hundred and one sights of Cairo and the neighbourhood were visited. The numberless mosques that vie with one another in splendour of architecture and colouring, the bazaars with their most cosmopolitan gathering of races that can be seen in the whole world, the Pyramids of Gizeh and Sakkhara and the Sphinx, and the other things too numerous to mention were all visited by eager throngs.

But there was plenty of work to be done as well. The ambulance had to be refurnished almost completely with new equipment to replace that lost at Helles. This kept the quartermaster's department busily engaged. Then there were the drills, which always loom large in the day's work in a more or less standing camp, and we required drilling badly to endow us with a renewed sense of self-esteem and to rub off the careless attitude towards many things, which is quickly bred by trench life. Those of us who had grown beards had to remove these hirsute ornaments, which did not fit into the new scheme of polished discipline.

We were very soon new men in appearance, health, and outlook. And in a few weeks we were moved from Cairo to take our place in the army guarding the Suez Canal.

This marked the second phase in our military career. We were plunged into a wholly new life. Our ways of living had to alter to suit our new environment. And amongst all the changed circumstances that we had to adapt ourselves to, there were none so great as these relating to the conduct of war itself.

It was some time before we settled into the new methods. We had to find our feet not only metaphorically but literally also. Those who have lived for any time on the desert will know that it is only gradually that the feet and legs accustom themselves to the soft sand. New muscles and new sinews are called into play, or rather it seems to be that the old muscles drop out of use, for after you have lived on the sand for any period of time and get back again to *terra firma* your shin muscles ache sorely for the first day or two. After months of disuse they become strained by being called on to give the spring in walking that one again acquires on the harder ground.

The methods of war were different. This was specially true of transport and equipment. The early days were spent in gathering up the animals and waggons remaining from the transport, which we had left at Alexandria the previous June, when we sailed for Gallipoli. The most of it had been taken away. Some had gone to units in Egypt. A great part of it had gone to furnish field ambulances for Salonika. What remained over was brought down to the new camp on the Suez Canal.

Then we had to collect camels. From this time the camel became incorporated as an intimate part of our economy, and eventually we had as many as 300. At the beginning his unconciliatory, supercilious ways, and his attitude of dignified disdain, not to mention his occasional outbursts of actual vice, rather chilled our dealings with him. But we little knew then how greatly our lives and comfort, and how greatly our failure or success, were going to hang on this at first despised animal of burden. It was not till long after that we came to realise the full worth of our new friend. And then our hearts were often filled with gratitude when we thought of the whole existence of an army that had depended on the four hundred pounds or thereby of food or ammunition carried on each back of that long, silent, and stately procession that followed in the wake of the moving troops. Many a time, also, have we

had occasion to thank our camel convoy for the days and nights of constant work entailed in clearing the wounded from the battlefield.

It was the end of February 1916 when we took up our quarters at Kantara, at that time a small station on the Port Said-Ismailia railway line and situated on the west bank of the Suez Canal. We opened our little hospital beside the Custom House, and during the heat of summer we lived a comparatively leisurely existence in which bathing and fishing helped for recreation.

We felt a certain thrill of pride in the thought that we were there to safeguard one of the world's greatest highways of commerce, and our British hearts beat high as we watched the great ships in constant procession sweep slowly past, and realised that in spite of war the vital links of empire were intact. At night, especially, after dinner we would sit and watch the liners glide past with their decks and saloons a blaze of light, silent symbols of our imperial power.

One day (10th April) our eyes were staggered by the sight of two large transports crowded with Russian troops. Someone soon came with the news that they had come from Vladivostok. Their appearance caused great surprise in our midst, and all sorts of surmises were soon abroad. Were they going to Salonika, or to France, or where?

From the time of our arrival our troops had been pushed forward some miles into the desert on the east to occupy strong posts, and we had an advanced dressing station in these early days at Hill 40, about 4 miles from the Canal. From there we brought our patients back to Kantara by motor cars.

Kantara is situated on the bridge of land that crosses the salt lakes and unites the western with the eastern or Sinai desert. *El Kantara* in Arabic means "the bridge." It is here that the great highway that links together Asia and Africa passes—the most ancient and in some ways the most famous road in the world. It was down this road that Abraham and later Joseph came from Syria into Egypt. At a later time Mary and Joseph with the child Jesus passed along the same track, and an old tree at Kantara is still shown as that under which the Holy Family rested.

Then along that road in ancient times the armies of Egypt passed to the conquest of Asia. With the decadence of the Egyptian Empire the hosts of Persia swept in to add Egypt to their conquests. At a later day Alexander the Great passed this

way to subjugate Egypt and to found his new city of Alexandria. Then under Napoleon the tide of invasion swept the other way. It was through Kantara that Napoleon's army, and later the great conqueror himself, passed to subdue the Arabs of Sinai and Palestine.

In the pre-war days this road was largely used by camel convoys, which crossed the Suez Canal at Kantara by means of a ferry. It then struck eastwards across the Sinai Desert, through Katia, El Abd, and Mazar to El Arish. From El Arish it passed northwards close to the shore past Sheikh Zoweid, Rafa, and Khan Yunus to Gaza.

Its course was determined by the wells, for in the desert the most compelling consideration is water, as we were so constantly to experience during the next two years.

In the early months of 1916 the beginnings of the broad gauge railway across Sinai were being laid at Kantara. We were present at its birth and we watched its growth step by step as it was thrust further and further forwards across the broad stretch of sand, until at last it found solid bottom on the soil of Palestine.

It was in the narrowest sense of the term a military railway, for in the desert, at least, the advance of the army was possible and was consolidated only in proportion as the line was laid. We paused when the railway paused and we leapt forward as the railway leapt forward. At no time in the desert could we be far in advance of the rail-head.

But, although its origins were purely military, there were many of us who could foresee a time, after the clouds of war had been swept away, when it would constitute a great commercial and political link between Africa and Asia. Long after the traffic of war is forgotten the busy trade of peace will be seen speeding across the yellow sands of Sinai and—who can tell?—the inhabitant of Cairo will be seen travelling north to spend his summer months among the hills of Jerusalem instead of taking his accustomed trip home. Since the days when we first knew Kantara the railway has spanned the Suez Canal by means of a pontoon bridge and the linking-up is now complete.

Colonel Young, who had been sent to hospital sick some months before, rejoined the unit at Kantara. In his absence Major Greer was in command.



## VIII. DUEIDAR.

23rd April 1916.

The first months of our new life were on the whole uneventful. There was no fighting on the big scale. Nothing but small encounters. At the end of March a detachment of the ambulance set out with a party of Yeomanry on a flying column into the desert and they returned some days after, tired and worn. They were all mounted for the occasion and, from evening of one day till the afternoon of the next, they covered forty miles across scrub and soft sand. It was a test of endurance for both man and beast, especially the latter. They came into touch with the Turks and retired after obtaining the information for which they had set out.

Some weeks after this there occurred one of the most thrilling incidents in the whole of the fighting in Sinai. It was on Easter Sunday, the 23rd April, at Dueidar, an oasis in the desert about thirteen miles east of the Suez Canal. The general story has already been told in the official and non-official accounts.

A small party of the Royal Scots Fusiliers held Dueidar as an outpost and were protected by redoubts situated some hundreds of yards in front of the clump of palm trees that marked the oasis. The main body was camped amongst the trees.

In the early morning hours, taking advantage of a thick mist, which enveloped everything, the enemy burst upon our fellows without warning and were soon within a few yards of the redoubts and the palm trees. In spite of the surprise of the attack, which was delivered by a force calculated at being seven or eight times greater than the outpost party, and in spite of the deadly rifle fire at close range, our men put up a gallant fight for several hours and held up the Turk till they were relieved by another company.

This reinforcing party marched hot-foot over the soft burning sand, covering a distance of seven miles in the incredibly short time of two hours, and then, instead of resting after their perspiring efforts, they at once opened their ranks and charged the Turk. The enemy put up a strong fight but was driven off in rout.

As was inevitable, our losses were serious. They occurred for the most part among the trees and on the open ground round the oasis. In the open there was no shelter, and among the trees there was little shelter from an encircling fire.

Such, in brief, is the story of a brilliant stand. But the story is not complete till the part played by the R.A.M.C. is told. These

formed a small band. But their work was great—as great as was their opportunity.

The dressing station at Dueidar was an advanced post of the Edinburgh Field Ambulance, consisting of one officer, one corporal, and seven privates.

Their story is best told by one of the survivors of this little band—Private J. M'Aslan. It is a tale of fine heroism, simply told.

"We were wakened at 4.30 A.M. by whistles blowing and then we heard rapid rifle fire. We all went to our posts. We knew exactly where to go, as we had had a false alarm the previous week. I went to the water-tanks to stop any leakages that might be caused by bullets. Captain Roberts, the post commandant, gave instructions that the medical officer had to go up at once to the redoubt on the right, where there were casualties. Lieutenant Miller ran across, taking Colthart with him. M'Kinnon and an R.S. Fusilier stretcher-bearer went across to the redoubt in front to attend to wounded, but the officer in charge would not let them take the casualties back, as the firing was too dangerous.

"About 7.30 A.M. Captain Roberts gave instructions that a man, who was carrying a message from the redoubt on the right, and who was struck about fifty yards from the trees, should be brought in. M'Donald rushed out and bandaged him up, and Ritchie followed with a stretcher. Just before Ritchie reached him, M'Donald was struck in the face, but, merely wiping the blood away, he gave Ritchie a hand with the stretcher. Ritchie was immediately afterwards struck on the shoulder. In spite of their wounds, they carried the stretcher about twenty yards. By this time blood was gushing freely from M'Donald's wound. Wright and Wood rushed out and brought the stretcher under cover of the trees. Corporal Raffin, seeing both Ritchie and M'Donald struck, rushed out to give them a hand, and was wounded by bullets through both thighs, just when he got beyond the trees.

"I was standing near, waiting for a suitable occasion to run over with water to the men in the redoubt. I dropped the water-bottles I was carrying, and rushed across and brought Corporal Raffin in by gripping him under the arms. He crawled twenty yards himself through the trees before I reached him. I carried him across to the opposite side of the trees, where our dressing tent stood.

"By this time the relieving company of R.S.F. had arrived. Their C.O.'s orderly rushed up shouting for R.A.M.C. men, as some officers were lying out wounded. I went along, and, with two

R.S.F. men, brought in Adjutant Crawford and Captain Bruce, A.S.C., who had been both wounded to the left of the trees, about twenty yards out. Captain Bruce was wounded whilst endeavouring to bring Lieutenant Crawford under shelter. I attended to Captain Bruce, but he was hopelessly wounded, and died half an hour afterwards.

"I went back to the tent to get more dressings. M'Donald had by this time dressed the wound on his face himself, and he had dressed Raffin's wounds. I saw Wood lying dead beside him. M'Donald told me that Wood had just brought some dressings out to him, when he was shot through the throat.

"We then set-to to get the patients away from the exposed front part of the wood, where the bullets were by now falling thickly. We carried them back two hundred yards or so, and then we redressed some of the wounds.

"By this time two medical officers and some R.A.M.C. orderlies had arrived with the relieving troops. I saw Lieutenant Miller being carried in. I heard afterwards that he had said to Colthart that he would have to leave the redoubt and run across to see how some of the men were getting on. He did not know that other medical officers had arrived by this time. He had seen men dropping amongst the trees, and saw that his services were wanted there. He was strongly advised not to risk exposing himself in the open, but he persisted, and he was badly shot through both thighs and in the hand soon after leaving the redoubt.

"M'Donald and Corporal Raffin were extremely plucky throughout the action. At the end a number of men came up and shook hands with M'Donald, congratulating him on what he had done. Even though his wound on the face was severe, he stayed at duty till 8 o'clock at night, and only left when all the wounded had been dressed and sent off. For a considerable time, in the absence of Lieutenant Miller, who was at the redoubt, Corporal Raffin supervised the collection and dressing of the wounded, and he came across to see how I was getting on at the water-tanks. He was very plucky and cool throughout."

It was a plucky incident, of which the ambulance is justly proud. For their bravery in front of the enemy Corporal Raffin and Private M'Donald were awarded the Military Medal.

This action is especially interesting in the history of our unit as it constituted the first occasion in the Sinai campaign in which a field ambulance was engaged in a battle.

## IX. BATTLE OF ROMANI.

4th August 1916.

As the railway advanced the troops pushed further and further forward into the desert, and by June we had an advanced station at Romani, which is about twenty miles or so from the Canal. The main station of the ambulance still remained at Kantara. To it all the casualties from the brigade, which it was our function to serve in the desert, were carried by the returning empty ration trains. In these days there were no ambulance trains. Cases which required to be evacuated from the main station at Kantara were taken to the general hospital in Port Said by means of an ambulance boat, which plied backwards and forwards along the Suez Canal.

The advanced dressing station of the ambulance in the desert in the early days was marked by a little bunch of circular tents, and its function was advertised to the world by the Red Cross and Union Jack flags flying horizontally from the cross-bar of the flag-staff. This had always been the custom, but in response to a message dropped on the 27th July from a Turkish aeroplane, stating that the station could not be picked out from the air, from this time afterwards a ground flag was used with a large red cross painted on it.

The message is in indifferent French and is reproduced here because of its interest.

"À l'Officier Commandant de Romani. Nous vous remercions pour votre avertissement sur la situation exposée de notre ambulance à El Atshan. Nous ne sommes pas en état de reconnaître vos ambulances. Nous vous prions de mettre des grands drapeaux blancs avec la croix rouge sur le sol."

It was perhaps just as well that we accepted the hint, because some days afterwards Turkish planes dropped a considerable number of bombs on Romani.

By this time the air was full of the rumour of impending battle. The Turkish army had crossed the desert for the second time and was again descending for an assault on the Suez Canal. They would be here in a few days, so the first story had it. Then we were told that they had thought better of it and were digging in some miles in front of our defences. Were we going to attack or were we going to let the Turk batter himself against our strong positions, as he must do sooner or later? For he could not main-



tain himself for long in the barren desert, with his base so many miles behind that the task of feeding his army and providing water and ammunition must have been a source of constant difficulty and anxiety. His only chance lay in a decision quickly sought.

The position we held was an extremely strong one by Nature. At Romani the desert rises into dunes, some of which are several hundreds of feet high. On the north the rising ground stretches in rolling dunes of sand to the sea about three miles away, whilst on the south and west the hills extend backwards in a wide circle as far as the eye can see. Standing on the high ground, which in places drops sheer down to the surrounding desert, one looks out for miles across the flat, sandy plain over which the Turk had to advance for the assault. In the near distance the clump of palms denotes the oasis of Abu Hamrah, whilst, away beyond this, the broad plantations of Katia and Rabah can be plainly seen.

It was a position endowed by Nature for a defending army, and the months of occupation had seen it transformed into a rampart of strength bidding defiance to even a large force intent on reaching the Canal.

The troops were confident and awaited the blow with cheerful, calm spirits. It was not long before the Turk was again on the move, and before dawn on Friday, the 4th August, his guns began to play on the strong chain of posts stretching along the heights of Romani. With dawn his infantry moved forwards to the assault, harassed constantly by our mounted troops which retired as he advanced. His aim was to turn the flank of the position from the south, and here the bulk of his troops were employed.

As the tide of battle swept round us to the south that afternoon, and we could see the Turkish shrapnel bursting on the hills far behind us, it looked almost as if the Turk had succeeded in his object and that we were being caught in a trap. It looked as if our only escape would be northwards by the sea. The enemy circled so far round our position and was so far abreast of our rear that his shells were falling on the railway between us and Pelusium, the railway station immediately behind Romani, and all traffic was held up. The writer, who set out from Kantara by railway on the morning of the battle to visit the advanced dressing station at Romani, found that, after a short distance, the journey was impossible and, in company with friends bent on reaching the same place, found it necessary to continue the journey on borrowed horses.

But we were not long in learning that the Turk had been lured

to his doom and that a strong counter-attack had immediately turned the tide of battle in our favour. Next day we saw the evidence of this in the long line of prisoners that were marched down the slopes just over Romani to the railway siding to be entrained for the base. On that occasion we counted fifteen hundred of them, and they kept coming in in batches thereafter till the numbers reached the grand total of four thousand or thereby.

The field ambulance was placed on some low ground a few hundred yards behind the defences. It was in the centre of things, and it looked many times as if some calamity might overtake it, but the shells and bombs fell at some distance all round and left us free to carry on the work, which the evening brought with it in full measure. We were so sited beside the railway that practically all the wounded passed through our hands. Placed, as we were, so near the fighting, the wounded began to pour in early, and during the Friday afternoon and night and the Saturday the camp was the centre of a busy traffic as the mule-drawn sand carts and the camel convoys arrived in constant succession laden with wounded. During these two or three days quite a number of wounded Turks passed through the ambulance station, and exhausted and emaciated a large number of them were, after their heavy marching across the sand and the long privations in food and drink which they had experienced. Their sufferings from thirst, especially during the final two or three days, must have been agonising. Fortunately the camp was not far from a plentiful water supply and we were able to give them as much as their heart desired.

During the earlier stages of the battle the wounded were carried by the stretcher-bearers from the posts and from the field to the sand-carts and camels, which were pushed forward from the dressing station to as near the area of the casualties as circumstances would permit. The sand-carts, or desert ambulance carts, as they were called officially, which were constructed for two patients, were used for serious cases in which severe jolting had to be avoided, *e.g.* abdominal wounds, fracture of the thigh, etc. The camel, which carried one patient lying or sitting on each side, was early found to be of little use for such serious cases, for the swaying gait and the jerking movements of rising up and getting down (or "barraking" as the Arabs call it) were so great that the patient's condition might suffer gravely from even a short journey.

From the point of view of field ambulance work in the desert, the experience of this battle provided many valuable lessons from which we profited in our future operations. Our own casualties were comparatively slight, but the collection of wounded from outlying parts of the field was such a slow process over the soft sand, and so quickly used up the animals, that the need for a comparatively large provision of sand-carts and camels for wounded in any desert fighting on a large scale was soon proved.

On the afternoon of the 5th August a section of the field ambulance with sand-carts and camels was hurriedly mobilised and set off with the mounted troops in pursuit of the Turk, who by this time was in full retreat. Later in the day another section of the ambulance mobilised with its brigade of infantry for the same object. These two ambulance parties did not rejoin the parent body for some days afterwards. During the pursuit the ambulance convoy with the mounted troops had some hard and exciting work to perform. But every hour of it was enjoyed as keen sport, and on their return there were many interesting stories to tell to those who had not been fortunate in being chosen for the "mobile."

In these days there were no ambulance trains to be seen in the desert like those that nowadays carry a wounded man to the base in smooth comfort. There were only improvised trains with luggage waggons transformed to carry stretchers. These were for severe cases. Ordinary ration trucks returning to Kantara empty were used for the transport of the more slightly wounded men. The journey was only a matter of twenty miles, though in an open truck, with nothing to shelter you from the blazing desert sun, even such a short journey might be trying to a degree.

Within a short time a fully equipped hospital train was placed on the line, and its first appearance at Romani, as its long length drew alongside the revetted banks of sand that formed the station platform, was a sight we shall long remember. The procession of white carriages with the painted red cross moving over the desert formed a pleasing picture, and for us it stood as an emblem of luxury and comfort among the drab surroundings of the desert.

The impelling needs of water in the desert have been referred to. Water is the fact that dominates every other consideration, and with an army such as ours it was a problem that required heroic handling. The amount of water that the desert itself could be trusted to provide, both from established wells and from wells sunk by the engineers in the country as we moved forwards,





A Mule-drawn Sand Cart.



Desert Hospital Train.

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was too limited for a big army. For this reason, we brought a great part of our water with us from Egypt by iron pipes, that were laid across the sand from Kantara and which were extended forwards as we advanced. A thought of what this means in labour, material and expense will show the bigness of the problem.

This water was drawn from one of the many canals that carry the water of the Nile to the sea. It flowed through Kantara, where it was taken off, purified first by filtration and then by chemical means, and thereafter pumped across the desert to reservoirs placed at convenient places for the troops.

The Sinai campaign saw two great romances in engineering. The one was the railway line that bridged the arid desert (that greatest barrier of all between countries) and brought two continents for the first time into close and lasting union. Its results are still obscured by the clouds of war, but it opened an era of illimitable promise. The other was the iron pipe that accompanied an army far into the waterless desert and that led to the thirsting troops the waters of the Nile.

### X. THE CAMEL.

The battle of Romani was the first great success in the field which our division had shared in. A Turkish army of no insignificant size was marching confidently to strike a blow at the Canal, in the hope of causing us serious commercial damage and difficulty and of impairing our prestige among the Mahomedan world of Egypt, India, and the East. It had been routed within a few hours of the first shock of battle, and it left large numbers of prisoners in our hands and large numbers of dead on the field.

The spirits of the men ran high. The magic power of success in battle was seen wherever you went amongst the ranks. And the intense work and training which were commenced to equip the army for mobile operations on the desert were taken in hand with alacrity and enthusiasm.

The question uppermost in all minds was, Were we going to settle down to defend the integrity of Egypt and the Canal, or were we going to push out across the desert to wrest Sinai back from the grip of the Turk and perhaps threaten his possessions in Palestine?

There is no harm now in referring to the mess-table discussions of the time on this, to us, all-important theme. The pros and cons, military and political, were considered and debated, and it is

interesting in retrospect, in view of the events that have happened since, to recall that the opinion that prevailed strongly was that we should probably find ourselves settling down into a life of passive defence. Our primary function was to maintain the security of the Canal, and we had the broad desert in front of us as our natural rampart. Why, then, should we thrust forward a long vulnerable arm when we could perform our functions by standing still? But our surmises were wrong, as subsequent events were to prove.

The next months in the field ambulance were spent in the preparation and development of our mobile establishment.

Those in authority determined that the main station of the ambulance would move by train and would normally be placed at railhead, whilst the remaining part of the unit would be mobilised completely. Sand-carts and camels in increasing numbers were drawn, and before long we had altogether in the ambulance a grand total of 337 animals—horses, mules, and camels. It was verily a huge array we presented when our whole body of men, sand-carts and camels, was set on the move across the desert—the sand-carts in single file, the camels three abreast.

The sand-cart was fitted with a spring bottom over which two mattresses were laid, and it was a very comfortable way of carrying two lying patients. In case of need three lying men could be taken. A circular canvas hood kept off the sun's heat. The wheels were fitted with broad metal tyres to increase the surface and, preventing them from furrowing deeply into the sand, it eased the traction for the four mules. Where the sand was specially soft six mules were employed.

The patient-carrying camels (for a considerable portion of the camels were used for the transport of equipment) were provided with litters or cacaolets. These were of two kinds—sitting and lying—and each carried two patients, one on either side of the camel's back. As has been already stated, a journey on a camel's back was never at the best of times a comfortable thing, and to a wounded man the swaying and jolting might be purgatory itself, so that the sand-cart was the conveyance most desired by our patients, and it was the method which we adopted as far as we could—at all times for the man badly hit, and as often as possible for the slightly wounded.

By this time the initial feelings of antipathy with which we received the camel's entrance into our scheme of things had largely passed off. For he had demonstrated the qualities which





Official Camel for Sitting Patients.



Improved Camel for Sitting Patients. Two Bars Crosswise over Saddle, Two Nets.

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henceforth made him indispensable to our life and work. At the beginning we had only remarked his vices, for his bad traits are all on the surface. His whole attitude bespeaks boredom and stolid indifference, and when he stands up and slowly moves his head from side to side, with a motion ever the most deliberate, he seems the incarnation of offensive vanity. I once heard him described as the "supercilious teapot." And the simile is as apt as it is humorous.

But we were not long in recognising the solid worth disguised beneath this unengaging exterior, for slung on his pack-saddle he would carry for you during hours and days across the soft sands a full weight of 400 lbs. of baggage. And he would utter never a word of complaint, except perhaps to gurgle or grunt a bit when the native driver went to fit on the load. But, strange to say, he was just as likely to express himself in similar terms when the driver, at the end of a hot day's march, started to release his burden.

There was another feature about the camel which early endeared him to our hearts. He cared not a rap for all the shells that ever were. Our long convoy once came under heavy shell-fire north of Gaza, and a number of the camels and mules were struck. The mules kicked and shied and threatened to stampede, but the camel column moved quietly on with apparent unconcern. I have seen a large herd of grazing camels caught in a sudden storm of shell. Numbers were hit, but their fellows continued to feed as if nothing were amiss.

And then, of course, there was his most remarkable trait of all, the trait that above all others adapts him to a desert life—his moderation in drink. He is popularly supposed to go for many days without water and suffer no harm. But this is not so. We found in practice that to keep him fit and well he had to be taken to water every second day, and it was only where water was gravely short, as not infrequently happened, however, that we allowed four or five days to elapse.

With all his good qualities, which raise him to the rank of the noblest beast of burden, in the interests of truth let it be at once confessed that he could at times be a cause of distress and even dismay in the camp. Without the least provocation he would sometimes suddenly seize in a vicious grasp the person nearest to his reach, and in most cases this was his own unoffending Egyptian driver. His jaws are powerful and in his bite he would crush a limb like matchwood. At other times,

when excited from any cause, he would suddenly go mad, or "macnoon" as the natives call it, and break loose, to cause consternation in the camp, until he was brought to bay by the drivers with a long circle of strong rope which they closed gradually round him.

There were only two occasions when his attitude of passive listlessness was roused into life. This outburst of insane ferocity was one. The other was when the feeding time arrived and the native drivers were paraded at the end of the camel lines to draw their forage ration. The long rows of sleepy animals were then as if galvanised into new life. They would all rise from the ground in a body, and, swaying and dancing from side to side in the most laughable manner possible, they would tug at their head-ropes in a perfect frenzy of excitement.

Despite his faults, he is a creature to excite wonder and admiration, and when the full story of the campaign is written a large page will be occupied by the work of the Camel Transport Corps, or C.T.C. as it was called for short.

#### XI. EL ARISH!

WITHIN a short time after the battle of Romani, by dint of hard work in which a thousand and one details came up for consideration and settlement, we were ready to move if required.

The ambulance was organised into a mobile section which was to accompany and serve its infantry brigade, a mobile convoy equipped with a large amount of camel and horse transport to evacuate patients from the forward section to the third portion of the ambulance, and the main dressing station, which moved forward with railhead. As the fighting troops might, in emergency, push out into the desert many miles from railhead, an additional ambulance convoy was organised later on. So that, in the end, the field ambulance consisted of: (1) mobile section, (2) two mobile convoys, and (3) main or headquarters section, each complete in officers, men, equipment, and transport.

In theory the scheme was good, but in practice it proved unwieldy and inelastic, and although devised to increase our mobility it had the very opposite effect. It was eventually abandoned and we returned to the conditions which had existed before, in which we had an ambulance whose chief characteristic was plasticity, and which could at a moment's notice be adapted to suit the most varying needs of the time.



An Improvised Camelot for Sitting Patients.



An Improvised Camelot for Patients Lying Down.



It was not till the 12th October that the troops moved out of Romani finally for the crossing of the desert. On such an occasion the spirits of all run high. The day was hot, but not with the intense heat of midsummer, as the long parallel columns set off eastwards with the slow half-shuffling pace acquired on the sand.

It was a great event. The spirit of adventure was in the hearts of all as they said good-bye to Romani that morning and marched off into the desert and the unknown. An element of romance always weaves itself round the place or the object of one's ambition. As they set off with their eyes towards the east that day the goal of their dreams was El Arish, for it was the gateway to the Holy Land, it marked the boundary of British rule and it was a town. The pleasure which we derived from the sight of a town and its life can only be appreciated by those who have lived long in the desert. El Arish before Christmas, and then, who knew, perhaps Gaza or Beersheba, or even Jerusalem.

When once it started, the army continued its forward journey by leaps and bounds for over five months until it was finally arrested before Gaza.

The mobile section and convoy of the ambulance accompanied the brigade throughout, whilst meantime the other section was left at Romani.

The progress of the troops was conditioned by the railway and by water, and every stage was in deliberate succession to the one before. For reasons which varied from place to place and time to time, the length of the breathing pauses during the advance varied greatly. At times the progress was slow, at other times it was rapid. Thus the records show that the ambulance was at El Abd on the 15th October. Salmata was reached on the 27th of the same month, and Mazar on December 8th. On 18th December a point 128 kilometres\* from Kantara was reached, and then for the first time El Arish was seen in the far distance, standing as it seemed to us just in from the shore beside a long luxuriant stretch of palms. Little of the town itself could be seen from this distance. Standing out prominently white against the dark green trees was the dome of the mosque.

If you want to enter into our feelings that morning as we gazed eagerly eastwards towards El Arish, you must try and imagine the circumstances. For months we had toiled across the soft burning sand. Morning, noon and night all round us, as far

\* In the absence of other distinctive means, we marked our progress by the railway, in terms of kilometres.

as the eye could see, there had been the broad stretching desert with nothing to vary the monotony of the landscape except that now it was flat and bare, at other times it was rolling with small hummocks covered by sparse shrub, on which the camel could snatch a meagre meal. On occasions a clump of palms clustering round an oasis would soothe the eye. And latterly the long belt of the Magara Hills that stretched across the southern horizon, with rocky valleys dipping deep into their side, helped to diminish the sense of oppressive illimitableness which the desert inspires. But even they wore a hostile look, for we knew the Turk was lurking there, ready to strike at our flank, and closing in on us as we advanced, the threatening aspect of the hills seemed to increase.

But, for the most part, we had spent months, which seemed to us years, of hot, unceasing monotony. And through it all our goal was El Arish. "El Arish by Christmas" was the watchword that had sustained us as we marched wearily on.

As we now beheld it in the early morning, sixteen miles away, the reality was as good as the figment of our fancy. A few more days, and then El Arish and the Holy Land!

By this time, it was rumoured, the mounted troops had occupied the town without opposition, and this was confirmed when we saw a brigade of our division march off to take possession. Within a day or two our own brigade, with the ambulance sections attached, was camped in bivouacs on the seaward side of the town, near the extensive palm grove.

El Arish was no exception to the oriental towns as we have seen them. It consisted of closely packed mud houses, with flat roofs and courtyards accommodating, during the day, the family, the poultry, and the household animals, and in which the domestic refuse of ages had gradually gathered. There are few things on earth more repelling to every sense than the yard of an Eastern house, and El Arish was no exception. Unless on duty, you did not linger long in its narrow, winding streets.

A large number of the natives were in the town when we arrived. Some had been there throughout the Turkish occupation, others had flocked back from the surrounding regions with the advent of our troops.

This reoccupation of the towns by their original inhabitants was one of the striking incidents which we noticed time and again during our progress through Palestine. To avoid the extortions and escape the evil ways of the Turkish soldiery, many of

the natives had migrated with their families into the surrounding wilderness, driving their flocks before them. Preferring the dangers and discomforts and risks of starvation to the greater perils of the towns, they would wander about till the appearance of the British troops proclaimed the restoration of law and order.

There was a tragic touch about the whole thing, and yet on occasions it was not without its element of humour. Whilst many of the natives forsook their villages to escape the Turk, others, either because they had been inspired by their masters with a dread of the British soldier, or because they had been left no choice in the matter, had, as we advanced, moved northwards with their flocks and families into villages behind the retreating Turk. At one time our progress was so rapid that villages were overrun and captured, and the Turk himself had just time to escape. The people, who had fled from the villages further south, then showed a great panic to get back to their native villages.

This was a common experience throughout the campaign in Palestine. But we recall one occasion specially. It was one early morning, when we were moving along the road from Herbieh to Esdud, hot on the track of the retreating Turk. Coming in the opposite direction we passed a constant procession of returning fugitives. There were all sorts and conditions. Old and young, men and women, boys and girls, the majority walking, others mounted on donkeys or riding on tumble-down carts of every description—all eagerly retracing their steps, some actually running in the vain hope of recovering the household goods they had forsaken in their hurried flight. I suspect their hopes were vain, because in war the looter is abroad in every village, and a forsaken home is soon robbed of everything of the smallest value.

When we arrived at El Arish we found a large number of the natives there. The majority of them were wretched and hungry, and the Military Governor, who had returned to the town after the arrival of the British troops, was anxiously engaged in making provision for their needs.

Very soon the occupation by the British troops was accepted by the people as a deliverance from oppression and a certain return to normal life became apparent. The imām could be heard shouting the muezzin at the appointed hours to call the faithful to their prayers. The women and girls trooped down to the wells on the outskirts of the town with jars on their heads to draw water—a sight in the East which always appeals to the western eye, alike from its reminder of the Bible times, as from the natural



beauty of the picture. The Oriental woman has a grace of carriage which is her chief, and, it must be confessed, often her only charm, and this is never more evident than when she is walking with a load on her head. So pleasing was the picture to the Tommy, that there was often an admiring throng with cameras gathered round the wells, and the attention which the women got caused them evident satisfaction, for they would linger whilst our men, in the broken Arabic which they had gathered in Egypt, attempted to establish a meagre conversation.

It must be admitted that the pleasure which the men derived from the proximity of a town was born very largely of the opportunity it gave them to see the opposite sex. And can you blame them? For to the Tommy, as to us all, one of the dominating misfortunes of this war is the removal of the pleasures derived from the company of the gentler sex. And this deprivation is one which has especially characterised the campaigns in which we have been engaged. Ask any man and he will admit, if you get a heart-to-heart confession from him, that after Gallipoli one of the greatest pleasures of all associated with the return to Egypt and civilisation was just this one of again beholding the divine figure of the fair sex after many months of the cruder association of his fellows.

We have all felt it, and we can understand and sympathise with the natural and innocent instinct which attracted these men as they paid their homage to the first women on whom their eyes had rested for many months.

It was whilst we were at El Arish that the mounted troops rounded up and defeated a body of Turks at Magdaba, capturing about a thousand prisoners. It was a very successful affair. A large number of the casualties, British and Turkish, passed through our hands. During this action our transport was hurriedly called out to the help of the field ambulances of the mounted troops. The call came during the night. It was unexpected and the men were all in bed. Despite this, the mobilisation was carried out so quickly that it constitutes a transport record of which the unit is proud to the present day. The men turned out, the mules were harnessed-up and hooked-in, and in twenty-two minutes the column of seventeen sand-carts was on the move for its long journey eastwards across the sand. The N.C.O. who was in charge and the men whose spirit rose to the call of duty in this memorable way all merited high praise. A special congratulatory message was received by the officer in charge of the ambulance

section from the general officer commanding the Australian mounted division on whose behalf the transport was turned out.

During the last weeks of the year the weather had changed, and instead of the days of constant sunshine with skies cloudless and clear except for the haze which excessive heat often produces, we were now suffering a complete reversal in climatic conditions. Days of teeming rain were succeeded by days in which a wind from the sea lashed us with a cold fury. The cold was on some days very great indeed, and after the months of desert heat it chilled us right to the bone and drove us shivering to the shelter of our bivouacs or our tents.

One of the greatest trials of desert wind is that it lifts the sand in great dense clouds. On such days sand dominates your whole life. It gets into your eyes and blinds you. It mixes with your food. It is driven into your bivouac or your tent and you find your table and your bed covered beyond recognition with a thick yellow pall. And do what you like you cannot keep it out. It percolates through the tiniest crevice, and the hand-bag, which you had locked and rolled for safety in your blankets, you discover on opening is half-full of the finest silt.

The worst storms we had were about Christmas, when the wind and rain were intense. On Christmas night, after we had retired to rest from the meagre celebrations which the desert fare allowed, the storm swore vengeance on our jollity; it rose in increasing force and, suddenly uprooting our tents, it left us helpless and bedraggled to face the evil night in our pyjamas.

A tempest completely alters the configuration of the country. You can watch the contours change from day to day. The wind catches the hills of sand in its course and it blows their tops right off, so that mounds become smaller and hollows become filled in. In course of time hills may be shifted bodily some yards away. The least wind will ripple the sand into fine waves as if it were playing over a calm sea, and, if you examine the sand wavelets, you will see that the surface away from the wind is steep and it meets the flat, rounded surface in a sharp edge. Exactly the same phenomenon is often seen in the larger mounds and hills of the desert. The surface towards the wind is blown right over the leeward side, which becomes steeper and steeper. In some ways the process closely resembles the waves of the sea breaking on the shore. Here the summit of the wave topples forward in a sharp edge as its base is arrested. Modified by the medium, the

phenomenon is almost similar in the wavelet and the hill in the sand. The sandy formation thus produced, or scree, as it is called, is one of the most characteristic features of the desert. As the prevailing wind blows in from the sea—from a direction almost due north—these scree face towards the south. Sometimes the steep edges may drop precipitously several hundred feet to the surrounding desert, and on several occasions our sand-carts and camels have just escaped tumbling headlong to disaster whilst on trek during a dark night.

It was whilst we were at El Arish (5th February 1917) that the news of America's entrance into the war first reached us. It came as a surprise, for, removed as we were so far from access to the world's news, we had not followed the events which led up to this startling development. The announcement stirred the hearts of all.

Meanwhile the preparations for the continuation of our onward journey were being pushed ahead. Stores of food and ammunition and materials had been accumulated mountain high and the next stage of our journey began.

We said good-bye to El Arish with feelings of genuine regret, for after the broken weather at the end of the year the time passed pleasantly. The afternoon intervals between work were filled in with bathing and cricket or football on the sand.

#### XII. FIRST BATTLE OF GAZA.

At the end of February we packed up and left El Arish, pushing some six miles across the desert to El Burj. We were now in Canaan. The ancient boundary between Sinai and the Holy Land was the river of Egypt, which has been identified with the Wadi El Arish. This is a shallow river bed which grooves the sand and opens at the sea in a broad, flat mouth which runs through a large grove of stately palms. It is dry all the year round, except for a few days in winter, when the heavy rains which fall on the Magara Hills flood the wadi bed. This happened during our stay at El Arish, and then during two days we had a sight of flowing water in the arid desert, the first we had had since we left Egypt many months before.

There is little to distinguish the country on the north side of the wadi from that on the south. Everywhere, as far as the eye can see, there stretch the same rolling dunes of yellow sand covered with sparse tufts of green growth. Some miles inland the Magara Range runs parallel to the coast, whilst to the north the blue

sheet of the Mediterranean extends in a great broad expanse to the horizon.

After a few days at El Burj we moved seven miles further on to Sheikh Zoweid. Here for the first time the unending barrenness of the desert becomes broken by patches of a uniform green. We can never forget the sensations of intense pleasure with which we feasted our eyes on the orchards, meagre though they are, which cluster round the village, whilst a mile or so beyond there burst upon our sight the glorious spectacle of a green field. It seemed many long years since we had last seen the green valley of the Nile. The fancy was captured by the unwonted vision, and eager pilgrims set out from the camp to pay their homage to this token of a bountiful Nature.

The desert still stretches this length in a belt of bright yellow sand about three or four miles wide which borders the shore. On the inland side the ground is firmer and for the first time there are tracks with some semblance to solid roads on which a motor car can be taken. But the soil is largely composed of sand, and the vegetation which now covers the surface in scattered patches of green has to struggle hard for a precarious existence. The fields of barley which charm at a distance with their mantle of green are found on closer view to consist of scanty stalks—a picture of sorry agriculture to the western eye.

But we were on firmer soil at last and our hearts rose at the prospects of leaving the desert behind. We were not yet ready to continue our onward journey, and we spent our days in the preparations of drill and marching with full equipment to accustom our feet to the new soil. We shod the horses anew. We removed the wooden "boxing" with which we had closed in our waggon wheels in the desert to prevent the sand from flowing between the spokes and gathering on the rim and so impeding their progress, and in a hundred ways we bethought ourselves of the new methods required for our altered circumstances.

The section of the ambulance which had been left behind at Romani some months before joined with the mobile sections at Sheikh Zoweid, moving up by train.

We were at last ready, and on Sunday the 25th March the division struck its bivouacs at Sheikh Zoweid and moved northwards in a long procession. To shorten the column we marched in three parallel strings, first the personnel, then the sand-carts, and alongside on the outer side of the column the camels three abreast.



Rafa was reached shortly after midday, and then it became evident to all that something was afoot. There was a few hours' halt, during which the camp was thrown into serious confusion by several of the camels which went mad and tore about, scattering the equipment and stores and cacolets broadcast. By 5 P.M. we were restored to order and moved out behind our brigade past the white stones which mark the boundary of modern Palestine.

The southern side of Khan Yunus was reached, and here we planted our camp in the dark. The night was damp and misty, and cold with a cold that reached right through to the marrow. The next hours were spent in gathering rations and water, for we were due to set out early the next morning. We breakfasted at 4 A.M., and whilst it was yet dark the camp was astir with movement. The camels and horses were fed, and the loads were fixed amid a bustle and confused din in which the voices of our men and the jabbering native drivers and their grunting camels vied with one another for mastery. With cold that made the teeth chatter and a mist that drenched through everything to the skin, it was a sorry throng that hurried about its duties that morning in the lamplight.

Just as the light of day broke through the canopy of drifting mist we moved off behind the brigade. The sun soon tore aside the last curtains of fog that hung about our path, revealing the broad spreading orchards of Khan Yunus and fields laden with crops and oranges enclosed in their low mud walls. It was a rare vision of rich beauty and plenty that met our gaze that morning whilst we were yet hardly over the fringe of the barren desert. Natives thronged the streets as our long column wound through the village, keen to dispose of their wares of large, luscious oranges at three for a shilling. Despite their price we bought them lavishly and enjoyed them as the thirst acquired on the desert sands alone knows enjoyment.

It was a memorable morning. The tangled, solid mass of men, horses, and camels pushed its way at a dragging pace through the village, and then we struck across a broad open stretch of bare ground straight for Gaza. In a few hours we arrived at Deir el Belah, and whilst the battalions pushed on ahead we unhooked our teams and led them to the water at the village.

By this time the noise of battle on the hills in front where Gaza lay was growing loud. The Turk had been driven back from one position after another. The mounted troops some weeks before had dislodged him from his strong defences at Rafa after a



Wadi Ghazze with Small Tributary Wadi.

stiff fight. He had now fallen back on the hill line with Gaza standing on its heights—a position of tremendous natural strength—at the end towards the sea, and Beersheba at the other end, thirty miles or thereby inland.

From Belah the ground extends northward for several miles in a flat plain, flanked on the west by the rolling dunes of the sand-belt, on the east by rough, rocky ground which rises in places several hundreds of feet high, and throughout is deeply cleft by steep winding wadis or gullies.

On the north the plain stops at the broad bed of the Wadi Ghuzze. The hills on the right fall away on the north and east into a flat plain. Standing on these heights, one can see away to the east the wadi twisting across the plain until it is eventually lost to sight behind the flat-topped height of Tel el Jemmi which stands in curious solitude, an abrupt mound rising in the flat.

Four miles or thereby from the Wadi Ghuzze the large town of Gaza stands on a commanding eminence, and its long stretch of white and coloured buildings and turrets can be seen for miles around. A massive grove of palms fronts the town and as you see it from below seems to conceal from view its eastern extremity. When we first saw the town the Dome of Gaza formed a distinct landmark, especially when its surface caught the rays of the western sun. But an explosion in the town early wrecked this interesting historical structure, and I do not think its loss was greatly bemoaned by our commanders for it must have been a valuable point for observation for Turkish guns.

Close against the eastern side of the town as you gaze from the plain, but in reality a matter of a mile and a half away, stands the prominent height of Ali Muntar. This is the mount before Hebron to which Samson carried the city's gates on his shoulders.

To an army the approach of Gaza from the valley of the Wadi Ghuzze is by four shoulders of rising ground. On the seaward side there is the undulating belt of yellow sand, to the east there are two ridges of irregular ground which run roughly north-east and south-west and are separated from one another and from the sand-belt by deep valleys, whilst further to the east a long hill which rises from the wadi bed some miles inland extends crosswise towards Gaza. The arrangement of these four rising backs of hill as they converge to the town may be likened to the spokes of a wheel with Gaza as the hub, surmounting the dominating height in which the rising slopes all meet and end. It was a position of great natural strength, as we were to discover ere long.



In the early afternoon of that day we followed the infantry of our brigade behind the sheltering banks of the high ground on the right and stood by in reserve ready to move. The noise and stir of battle was all around. Our guns were battering the slopes before Gaza and Ali Muntar, and in the intervals the crackle of machine-guns and rifles could be heard on the far-off ridges which our troops were scaling. Climbing the high ground in front of us we got the whole position stretching in panorama before our eyes—a diagram of moving battle such as we had never seen before. Scattered bodies of horsemen crossed the plain or climbed the hills beyond, in places here and there the little bunch of white tents showed where the dressing stations stood, guns and ambulance carts could be seen moving to and fro behind any shelter there was, whilst scattered batteries flashed as their guns poured their shell amongst the Turks. Beside us the generals, surrounded by their red-capped staff, eagerly watched the progress of the fight, whilst messages flew across the wires that buzzed in the signal-wagon near by and round which there eddied an unceasing stir of orderlies on motor-cycle and horse. It was a thrilling sight, reminding one of old-time battle.

An airman who landed near gave us the latest news of the fight. He had just flown low over the field and saw it all. The cavalry had encircled the city. He had seen their horses as far as the shore on the further side of Gaza and our infantry were on the outskirts of the town on this side. The town would fall by 6 p.m. There could be no doubt of it. It was just a matter of hours now.

But it was not to be. The ground was won and victory lay with the rich prize within a hairbreadth of our grasp. But the cactus hedges bristling with machine-guns held back our infantry as they stormed the city wall from the southern slopes. They fought with an intrepid dash and determination that all have learnt to admire, but they could not pierce the solid wall of defence. The cavalry bore the brunt of the battle and many are the deeds of gallantry that they performed. They entered the city and carried off some Turkish guns and a Turkish general, who was surprised riding through the streets in his cab. Guns and general and cab were all led back in triumph. But the horses could not hold out, for there was water to be had nowhere. Though victory to our arms was as near as it ever was, the attack was called off for the time.

The next morning we watched the weary horses filing back in

long lines to water and we saw the infantry march in to rest after their days of intense trial.

Later in the day we pitched our camp beside the main Gaza road and lent our help to the ambulances of the other divisions which were being sorely pressed. All night long convoys of sand-carts and camels converged to our camp and our twin lights, like moths round a candle. The lighter cases were carried off to the Q.C.S. at Khan Yunus by camel, the more urgent cases by motor ambulance cars which were already on the road.

After a few days of unsettlement, in which our movements were in debate by those in authority, we settled down to another period of preparation.

So ended for us the first battle of Gaza.

### XIII. SECOND BATTLE OF GAZA AND AFTER.

The next days were spent in gathering forces, and stores of food and ammunition for the next assault on the hill fortress which we had failed to reduce at our first attempt. We had outstripped the railway, but this rapidly overtook us at the rate of a mile a day, and before long we had all the accessories of war in ample measure ready to our hand. Among them a casualty clearing station was pushed up to the railhead at Belah and our ambulance problem was lightened. The roads were improved, ramps were cut across the Wadi Ghuzze for troops, waggons, and guns, and deep wells were dug in the wadi bed to overcome the dearth of water which had handicapped our previous attempt.

These were busy days. From early morning till far into the night fatigue parties were strenuous with pick and shovel clearing a way over trackless waste or through wadi bank so that the next onrush would sweep over the further hills in a great encircling wave, with nothing to impede the men and guns and supplies moving forward in deliberate irresistibility over prospected roads. Infantry in fours here, field guns and waggons there, whilst over other tracks and other wadi crossings only heavy guns would pass. With faultless precision and an organised scheme, which foresaw and met every contingency of battle, the staff worked out their plans.

The Wadi Ghuzze, which stretched to the sea between us and the Turks, formed a great barrier between the opposing forces. Fortunately the previous battle had ended in its passing into our possession, though the Turkish patrols came right to the further

bank at night. During the day our preparations were pushed apace without disturbance except for the Turkish shells that fell in spasms amongst our working parties. In a few days there were crossings at all important points. In many places this necessitated deep cuttings in the banks, which often rise sheer from the bed to the height of twenty or thirty feet. It was strenuous work and the days were hot, but the large parties told off for the duties soon cut ramps sloping in gentle gradients from the ground level to the sandy wadi bed.

During the summer, and late into the winter, the wadi is dry, though its high, sharp banks show that with the winter rains the torrent that tears along to the sea from the inland hills must be deep and strong. During the dry months there is a running stream hidden below the wadi bed, as is shown by the large spring that gushes in a constant current from the ground near the mouth of the wadi. This subterranean river was tapped by wells dug at intervals, from which the water was raised by pump for the supply of man and beast. As is natural, the deeper wells were further from the mouth, the shallower wells were near the sea. A remarkable discovery which was made during the digging of these water-holes—and the same fact had often been noticed in the desert before—is that the salinity of two wells separated from one another by only a comparatively few yards may differ very greatly. The one might be undrinkable for man or horse, the next might be as sweet as a highland spring at home.

After two weeks of preparation we were ready for the next attack. This time our division was to be engaged and was to be placed in the centre of the frontal assault on the slopes facing Gaza. Another division was to advance along the dunes by the sea, whilst the other infantry and the cavalry were to sweep round from the right. This was the general scheme as we knew it. There were endless details of disposition and of attack which it is too early yet to relate.

On the 16th April the brigade with which we were affiliated moved forward across the wadi under cover of dark and placed itself astride the shoulder of ground that slopes in a series of rising knobs from the further bank of the wadi up to Ali Muntar. Here they dog themselves in. The dressing station followed, installing itself in a quarry situated in a sheltered site behind the lower slopes.

The bombardment preceding the attack commenced on the morning of the 19th April and lasted from daybreak for several

hours, after which the troops all along the line advanced to the assault on the higher hills that guard Gaza on the south. The fight continued hard and fierce during the forenoon and well into the afternoon. The troops advanced for a time despite the dense wall of fire that burst out from the guns and machine-guns which the Turks had kept waiting in silence in expectation of this blow. The day was burning hot, but still our gallant boys threw themselves against the Turkish defences in repeated efforts. Those who saw it all will tell you that these rugged hills in front of Gaza saw that day deeds of daring and courage that should rank high in the annals of British battles. Ground that was to be of great value in later days was wrested from the Turk, but the solid wall of shot could not be pierced despite it all and the order to cease fire was given. The night was spent in consolidating the gains.

During this battle the ambulance was heavily engaged and our losses were severe. The advanced station moved forward with the troops and was finally established in a deep wadi far up on the hillside. The main station was placed on the left bank of the Wadi Ghuzze and between the two, for twenty-four hours, the convoys of camels and sand-carts plied with their load. Early in the day, thanks to the success with which the wadi had been ramped for traffic, we were able to get our motor ambulance cars pushed right up to within a short distance of the battle zone.

We shall always look back upon these two days—the 19th and 20th of April 1917—as the most supremely trying days which we have ever spent. Amongst all the battles into which the fortunes of war have thrust us, this stands out pre-eminent for its stern grimness and tense trial bordering on disaster. The only experience which ranks beside it in the long chapter of our fighting in foreign fields is the battle of Achi Baba in July, two years before. So dominating a place does this second battle of Gaza occupy in the memory of us all that it seems cheapening these days of grave anxiety to the verge of affectation to slip them past with only a few lines of record. But these times of past conflict are still too close on us and the needs of secrecy are still too impelling to allow the pen the licence required to do justice to experiences which often wore the character of things that change the whole course of a man's outlook and being. Such for us was the battle that raged round these heights before Gaza during that day of April, with its aftermath that tested the courage and endurance of all.



For their gallantry during this action the officer in command of the advanced station (Captain Greer) received the Military Cross and a sergeant the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The official statement of the deed which won the latter honour is given here. It reflects the greatest credit on the N.C.O. and the men who worked under his command.

"327. Sergeant Andrew Messer. Exceptional gallantry and devotion to duty before Gaza on 19/4/17, when he supervised the collection of wounded during constant shell and rifle fire. At one time, in the absence of an officer, recognising that the regimental aid post of one battalion was becoming congested, he hurriedly organised a line of stretcher-bearers, and steadied and encouraged them while the wounded were being removed.

During the night of the 19/4/17-20/4/17 he was in charge of stretcher-squads which went forward to try and rescue seventeen officers and other ranks who were lying in a position of great danger. This entailed about four hours' work, during which he guided his party over extremely difficult country. He rescued some of the wounded and brought them back to the advanced dressing station. Although exhausted, he persisted in going back and was successful in recovering and bringing in the entire party. This exceptionally good piece of work was due very largely to his pluck and endurance. He himself helped to carry the patients. At the end he arrived back in camp in a state of collapse from exhaustion."

In addition to the memorable work of the R.A.M.C. personnel, officers and men, mention must be made of the gallant and untiring services rendered by the transport of the ambulance during the battle. It usually happens that the deeds of the A.S.C. in battle are carried out in comparative obscurity. Surrounding their work there are relatively few opportunities for that glamour and display of outstanding and sometimes dramatic bravery which often attends the work of the stretcher-bearer, whose lot is cast during battle far forward in the zone of shot and shell. The A.S.C. personnel, with their mules and carts, are naturally limited in their activities to a sphere further behind. Despite this, the risks run and the chances of good service may in their own way be as great as are experienced by their fellows in the front line.

So it was during this battle. For thirty-six hours the ambulance carts moved backwards and forwards between the advanced dressing station and the main station, and every now and then, when the casualties were gathering fast at some regimental aid post far up in front, they were pushed forward to relieve the congestion. A

rule which is only rarely broken prescribes that the transport of an ambulance does not advance beyond the advanced dressing station. But in battle there are occasions when every rule must be broken. And during this fight the rules of transport had to give way to the urgent circumstances of the moment.

It is not surprising that our casualties amongst the animals were heavy. On this occasion they were unusually heavy. But by a miracle we had no casualties amongst the A.S.C. drivers.

There were several deeds of outstanding gallantry on the part of the men, but as so often happens in battle there were so many recommendations from all parts of the field that every deserving man could not receive his decoration. Our men were recommended, but without success. From the warrant officer in charge of the transport, on whom falls on such days many stiff problems of organisation and of roads, down to the most junior A.S.C. driver, the services rendered are worthy of all praise.

During the battle, also, we were largely dependent on our caacolet camels and their Egyptian drivers for the clearing of the wounded from the field. In battle the stoical camel is a creature to inspire admiration in the hearts of all. Hour after hour he crosses and recrosses the shell-swept zones, carrying water, stores, or wounded men, with an indifference to danger and a patient, uncomplaining endurance which nothing can interrupt. Over the whole field of battle there is no greater demonstration of heroism than that exhibited by this silent, stately animal. The native driver is admirably suited by nature for the work into which his lot is thrown. He seems to borrow from his dumb comrade the qualities of persisting brave effort. Many were the deeds of gallantry performed by these common Egyptian fellahs during their repeated battles in the desert and in Syria. Decorations meant nothing to them. The only way of rewarding the lower Oriental is by money. A reward of three or four pounds sterling was presented to those who had distinguished themselves in an outstanding manner. It meant more to them by far than the V.C. would have done.

After the second battle of Gaza we settled down to trench life to wait for the next stage of the struggle. We heard that a new General-Commanding-in-Chief had arrived and we knew that this would soon spell new methods of work for us in the front areas.

With the break in the suspense of battle we had time to look around and we recall the interest which the natural history of the

place soon developed in our midst. At our first arrival the fields were green with young barley and the pastures were covered with a multicoloured carpeting of flowers which could not but charm our eyes and hearts after the sombre yellow bareness of Sinai. There were daisies spread in thick beds, with irises, poppies, and a mingled multitude of blossoms strange to our eye. Ants were plentiful and the crawling things of the earth were legion. When the candle was lit in the bivouac at night one could see as one lay abed a whole host of life springing into being as if at the touch of a magician's wand—gnats and other flying creatures of all sorts and shapes and colours. There was one specially resplendent, with a long dumb-bell-shaped body of a deep red hue and four gorgeous wings of cream striped and speckled in black. As he clung to the wall of the bivouac, with his two black beads of eyes fixed in a stare of fascination on the light, he inspired one with a curious mixture of earnestness and admiration. Spiders in armies crowded round the light—large, small, slow, rapid. One large fellow had a habit of tearing about in a feverish haste as if he had not a moment to lose. Caterpillars crawled upwards along the grass twigs into the area of light and swung about in ecstasy in mid-air.

For a week or two in the spring we watched the fire-flies flitting about in the dark round the bivouac. Their sparkle of throbbing light as they dart hither and thither is a natural phenomenon absorbing to see. We watched their torch whilst they were at rest. Even whilst you are examining the fly with a light it still glows and fades—a veritable electric lamp on the ventrum. You can easily satisfy yourself that it is not due to the passage of electric sparks between the wings, an explanation we had heard somewhere.

In the fields birds are plentiful—larks, wheatears, sparrows, vultures—and at one time we saw quite a number of kingfishers in a startling robe of purple and green.

During the rest of the summer the ordinary routine of the camp kept us occupied. Amongst other activities we threw ourselves with renewed zest into the problems of sanitation, and by the end of the summer we prided ourselves in the thought that, thanks to the enlivened sanitary conscience of the troops and the response which our efforts met on all hands, our field hygiene was well-nigh perfect. We certainly were gratified in the thought that sickness in the Army was reduced to lower figures than we had ever known before.

The preparations for the coming battle which we knew would flare up again ere long were pushed ahead, and although the long spell of waiting was not to our liking and tested our patience, there was plenty for our hands and our minds to do.

#### XIV. THIRD BATTLE OF GAZA—HESI.

The battle, which had long been prepared for, commenced on the night of the 1st November with the most vigorous artillery outburst which we had so far ever seen. It was known to all that guns, large and small, had arrived to storm the strong Turkish defences, but none of us had in our wildest dreams pictured the massive intensity of the fire that broke out that night at the appointed hour. It was as if the Furies, which had been straining at their chains for many months, had with one sudden, supreme effort at last burst loose. For hours a tornado of high explosive and shrapnel poured on to the Turkish positions, and, standing on the sandy knoll on which our camp was placed, we could watch the storm of flame breaking round the summit of Samson Ridge. Though several miles away, we could see the sand-crests in front of Gaza lit into distinctness as the brilliant flashes rent the darkness of the night.

The official records will tell you that the division which was to storm the Turkish strongholds in front of Gaza and towards the coast was reinforced by a brigade of our own division. For several days and nights there was intense fighting, in which the land guns were joined by the guns of the fleet of warships standing out from the shore opposite Gaza, which poured an incessant fire into the Turkish flank.

Steady progress was made though the Turkish defences were powerfully constructed and heavily manned, and each day brought news of the victories on our right towards Beersheba, where our heaviest attacks were launched to turn the Turkish left flank.

Bit by bit our battalions gnawed into the Turkish front on the belt of sand, and within a day or two the sand dunes along the shore were cleared from Sheikh Ajlin as far forward as Sheikh Hasan. We were now round the seaward flank of the Turk, and his left flank towards Beersheba had been broken, so we were not surprised when, in the early morning of the 7th November, we heard that the Turk was retreating.

The word for which we had waited so many months at last arrived in the late morning: "Be ready to move at half-an-hour's notice." The tents were struck, the blankets rolled, the camel-



tanks filled with water, and the panniers, stretchers, etc., all laid out on the sand in camel loads. Never was order obeyed with greater spirit. Within an hour or two our long procession was in motion across the sand and joined up at Sheikh Ajlin with the brigades which were marching in column northwards along the shore.

The spirits of all ran high. Everywhere the sense of victory was abroad. I doubt if there is anything can stir the heart and fire the pulse of Scotsmen like battle breaking into victory.

The last five days had been days of stern struggle. They had fought hard and fiercely, and many a grim story could be told of the nights which had been spent in bloody encounter on the dunes and in the trenches, or rather behind the barricades on these rolling sand-hills facing Gaza.

As they set off that day in a long line beside the water's edge the grim Scotch faces were relaxed. The memory of repeated, anxious struggles was dispelled by the magic touch of victory. They were tired with weary nights but, as they marched off, you could see that their hearts pressed forward with eager desire.

Gaza was captured or as good as captured. But by a strange turn of fortune we were never to set foot in the town before which we had sat for so many months. Gazing on it from the plain, with its buildings and towers stretching along its commanding height, we had often looked forward to the time when we would march through the streets and over the height of Ali Muntar. But we were never to realise our dreams.

We continued our march along the shore to near Wadi Hesi, where we camped for the night. Our brigade pushed forward to occupy the sand dunes extending inwards from the shore. Next morning at dawn we were all afoot again and set off behind the brigade. In a short time we reached the Wadi Hesi, which was crossed at its mouth. At this point we came under observation from the Hesi Ridge and our long procession of camels and sand-carts was severely shelled by the enemy guns. It was a moment of intense anxiety, for there was no shelter—nothing but a bare, broken stretch of beach. Fortunately the mules had gone forward some hundreds of yards to water, and a general stampede was averted. The camels, however, received a sorry knock. Despite it, the long procession moved slowly forward in perfect order. The camel tribe is not to be hustled even when faced by danger and death. At such a time theirs would almost seem to be an indifference born of fatalism.



R.A.M.C. on the March.

Soon after crossing the Wadi Hesi the brigade deployed for the assault on the ridge of sand which bears the same name and which, rising in rolling dunes inwards from the sea, barred our further progress on this flank.

The advanced dressing station by nightfall was pushed up on to the western slopes of the ridge, and all night long the main dressing station on the beach was busy with the dressing and feeding of the wounded who were carried down the slopes on sand-cart and camel.

During the day willing workers had scooped the sand into holes which sheltered our patients from the enfilade fire that swept the beach. We were under observation both from the Hesi heights and from the more distant peak of Ascalon, whose ruined tower shone out distinct and white as it caught the rays of the setting sun. Tents during the day were therefore impossible, but with dusk, which is always early in the East, we pitched our little camp by the water's edge and with muffled lights we organised our premises and got to work with a speed that comes only with practice.

To lighten the camels for a rapid move the great bulk of the tents and equipment, which had gradually been gathered during the long period of rest before Gaza, had been dumped before the ambulance set out on trek. The marquees and the hundred and one other items of equipment, which all make for comfort and spacious ease in a resting camp, are incompatible with a mobile column. Here only the barest requisites can be carried, and we were now depleted of all except these. Three operating and half a dozen circular tents was the sum-total of the tent accommodation carried.

But experience is a stern mistress, and she had taught us how to adapt our ways to suit our means. Within a short time you would see a host of bivouacs suddenly spring into being, constructed of stretchers or blankets held up with a few odd bits of wood always carried for the purpose. A simple blanket bivouac with the proper slope to its roof will keep out the heaviest rain, and under its cover a man will rest at peace while the elements storm all round.

Whilst the battle raged on the sand-hills we got our house in order, and with nightfall, when the wounded commenced to arrive in constant succession, we had our little camp ready. During a battle the intense work for us usually comes with the night for it is late before the wounded collected from the field reach the



stations. And so it was that night. Once started, a constant traffic eddied round our dressing station all night.

There are some scenes of this and other campaigns that are fixed in our memory with a seal that time can never efface, and one of these is that little strip of flat beach just below the Hesi Ridge as we saw it that day. Behind us were the rounded hills of sand, with here and there a patch of scrub and trees, and an orchard, where the high ground dipped down into the wadi bed. To the north, as far as the eye could see, stretched the dunes of sand rising in the distance into the heights of Askalon. To the south lay the belt of sand across which we had come, whilst westwards spread the broad blue expanse of the Mediterranean. Ordinarily a scene of quiet, and with little unusual to attract the eye. Many such there are along that line of coast.

But as we watched it that day it had all the lurid fascination of battle. We could see our men in their parallel lines advancing over the knolls to the charge, through the storm of shrapnel that broke about their heads, and the high explosive bursting in great clouds of smoke that looked as black as jet against the yellow sand. On the near face of the hills our forward batteries were in constant action, served by the limbers that kept coming backwards and forwards from the shore; whilst from the sea the warships, which accompanied our flank on the journey north, sent their whizzing shells over our heads amongst the Turks.

And the beach itself! The seething mass of life crowded into that half-mile stretch of sand—camels, horses, guns, mules, limbers, and men huddled close under the low bank out of sight of the enemy posts—formed a scene of general confusion such as the battlefield alone can show and which no pen can depict. In the centre of it was the bare patch where our station lay, mingling with, and adding its quota to, the confused stir of life, and only discernible amongst it all by the Red Cross flag that flew in the breeze, and by the sand-carts, which we had tipped up to form shelters for the wounded, and which showed at a distance by their white rounded canvas hoods.

Near by, the 18-pounders were in action, where they had been unhooked from their panting teams earlier in the morning. The horses stood resting near at hand. At another place a body of engineers were busy raising water from their spearpoints pushed at random into the sand.

Amid this scene we worked away during that day and night. As the convoys arrive in front of the station, the patients are

unloaded and sorted out according to their injuries. At one tent the full particulars, which the Army demands for accurate record, are compiled by the clerks as the men are led or carried past in order. No man must be missed at any cost. In the operating tents the surgeons are busy with the cleansing of the wounds and the application of splints. In one tent the cases badly hit receive special care, whilst through the other the slighter cases are led to receive any treatment necessary. Thereafter they are taken to another region of the station to be fed and to await evacuation.

Before being despatched every man must be fed, and fed well, because a wounded man is a hungry man, and after days of fighting and marching he is a thirsty man. Give him beef-tea, cocoa, or any other unusual beverage you think is good for him and he will not thank you. But give him pints of tea with plenty of milk and sugar and his face beams with gratitude. So it is that, on such an occasion, the cooking and quartermaster's department of the ambulance are working at full steam, and the prospects of such an occasion repeated in close succession mean that many camels in your procession have to carry stores of food, that must be replenished constantly.

Then every man must be warm throughout his journey, for nothing is more likely to kill a wounded man than cold, and the nights of a Palestine winter can be very cold indeed. Blankets, and still more blankets, is the constant cry.

When you have marshalled sufficient wounded men for a convoy, the evacuation N.C.O. orders round the required camels and sand-carts from the transport lines close at hand. The loading up commences, and before long the procession of the maimed is on its way from the storm of battle to the comfort of the casualty clearing station. A few days before, we had watched these men all eager for the fight, with the smile of victory on their faces, as they spurred off from Gaza after the Turk. There is a smile on their faces again, still the smile of victory, but to it is added the smile of relief from a great strain.

During this action the ambulance had a great opportunity of useful work, and it availed itself of this opportunity to the utmost. There were many deeds of gallantry and devotion performed by all ranks—both R.A.M.C. and A.S.C.—and many honours might have been won but never came our way.

The only honour was the Military Cross given to Captain R. G. Walker for his gallant behaviour whilst in command of the advanced section.

## XV. OUR LITTLE PROBLEMS.

The battle of Hesi Ridge was the first battle of real, live, moving warfare which we had fought since we left home. The battles in Gallipoli had been trench-to-trench fights with little forward movement of troops, and on no occasion had the advance been sufficient to entail a forward movement of the field ambulance. So it had been to a large extent in the first two battles of Gaza, whilst at Romani the troops at no time had pushed far beyond their base.

Already, within a day of the fall of Gaza, we were moving rapidly after a retreating enemy, who showed that he meant to obstruct our way with a vigorous rearguard resistance. There was to be fighting, as Hesi early showed, and severe fighting, before the soil of Palestine was to be freed of the Turk. Little did we know that day how hard and stern the struggle would be before we reached the walls of Jerusalem.

Ambulance work resembles the various services of supply and transport in the difficulties and problems which arise for the first time when an army gets on the move. In the one case the stretching out of the interval between the troops and their base multiplies the problems incurred in the provision of food for man and beast, and of the ammunition, stores, and the hundred and one things that an army must have at all times and without stint. And the difficulties increase more in geometric than in arithmetic proportion as the interval lengthens out. So with the medical services, where the base recedes further and further as the army advances, the problem of getting back the wounded and the sick becomes greater and greater.

We knew all that, and we had provided for it. We had transport in ampler measure than probably any ambulances have ever had; and one was almost tempted to think, in watching the endless train of carts and camels, that our "travelling circus," as one wit irreverently called it, was a procession of luxurious wastefulness.

But that night at Hesi was calculated to dispel any such illusion. For we had to clear the field of battle, remove the patients from the advanced to the main station, thence transport them miles back along the shore through deep, soft sand, and at any time be prepared to pack up the tons of baggage at a moment's notice and set off on the next step of our forward journey! And more: there was the prospect that the morrow

might mean the whole same thing over again! If you pause to think, you will recognise the nature of the task and the risk of a faulty machine breaking, with attendant disaster.

That night, as on many nights since, we have watched the long convoys of camels and sand carts set off from the ambulance on their backward journey, knowing that they could not return for many hours, and we have wondered anxiously what the fates had in store for the morrow.

But the rules of ambulance work in the field foresee and provide for such a contingency as far as human mind can provide. An axiom, which you break at your peril, is to keep the forward ambulance section empty at all times of the night or day, so that, at a moment's notice, it can set off in the immediate wake of the moving troops. Where, as must always occur on occasions during heavy fighting, you have to compromise between mobility and immobility, this compromise must never touch the mobile section. The ambulance station behind may be split up, so that one part remains with its casualties, provided with an ample supply of food and drink and all the other requisites, and a proportion of transport to clear it gradually, whilst the other part packs up and pushes on behind the troops. This you may do, and sometimes you must do, but it is the extent of your compromise if you have a just dread of disaster.

This is one, perhaps the greatest, of the problems we had to face during our rapid progress. But it was one only. The term "communications," and what it stands for—a simple term to the untutored mind, but one of sinister significance to all who have served the stern apprenticeship of war,—was another of our daily struggles. To be a successful soldier you require all the virtues of a sage, and all the cunning of a devil. You have to know your job and do it with an intensity that engrosses your mind and energy and rides rough-shod over every obstacle. And you have to know every other man's job, and what he is doing at the moment and intends to do the next. You discover his actions or his intentions by suave means; but, failing that, you call him to stand and deliver at the peril of his life. And in return you tell him what you think he should know about your doings or your prospective doings, whether he asks you or not. When you can do all that and fight your hardest all the time you are qualifying for soldiership, and you understand the elements of "communications." You have to be on the spot, and all other spots as well.



These axioms must dominate your living at all times and at all places, whether you are a combatant or non-combatant, whether you are Infantry, Artillery, or A.S.C., or R.E., or R.A.M.C. If they do not, and in your ignorance you remain rolled in your mantle of layman obsolescence, you become smothered in your own task. You are soon at sea, your communications cut.

The sooner you take these lessons to yourself with special zeal, if you are in the R.A.M.C., the better for yourself and those others who depend on you. For during the stress of the fight you are apt to be forgotten unless you obtrude your presence to the risk of annoyance. In an ambulance you have to keep in constant touch with what is going on in front, and you have to know what is taking place behind. You must be *au fait* with the movements of the brigade and the changing dispositions of the battalions of that brigade.

The forward links in the ambulance chain we maintained during the advance by keeping the advanced station as close as circumstances permitted to brigade headquarters. Runners stationed at the "signals" office sped across with all the orders, and it was an easy journey for an officer, when there was a suspicion that something special was afoot. Then, still further forward, each regimental medical officer took with him, wherever he went with his battalion, some stretcher-bearers from the ambulance, who passed backwards and forwards to the advanced station with the casualties, and in the process kept alive the bond between the ambulance and the moving battalions.

Then the rear station of the ambulance must know at any moment the precise location and the likely movements of the forward station. This would be done by the returning convoys, or, in case of special need, by mounted orderlies on picked steeds.

During a dark night, in an unknown land, a compass and a map will help you on your way. But you must not trust the map too implicitly, and the clouds have a perverse habit of blocking out the only stars you know, at the precise moment which matters.

At such a time you cherish a good guide as worth more to you than all the gold the earth ever gave, and if you want to avoid the holes and ruts that break the axles of your carts and your camels' legs, the best guide of all is a native of the adjacent village, if you have someone by you who can speak his language.

In an ambulance it is essential to keep in touch, not only with the headquarters of the brigade, but also the headquarters of the division. The A.D.M.S. must know where you are, for he may

at any moment, when occasion demands it, have to push your ambulance in to help another ambulance serving a brigade which may be miles away. And you must know where the A.D.M.S. is, for he can help you out of a difficulty when no one else can. And then constant touch with the people still further behind you must be maintained, for you require to know at any moment where your patients are to go.

Such are some of the lessons to be learnt while you are courting that mistress of war—"communications." We had learnt some of them during our long tramp over the desert sand. Our later instruction came with Hesi and the days that succeeded it.

#### XVI. KATRAH AND MUGHAR—A DRAMATIC FIGHT.

The morning of the 9th November broke in peace and quiet. In battle there is a short interval after dawn during which, as if by mutual consent, a respite falls on everything. But as the shadows of night fled and the full brightness of day fell on the slopes of Hesi that morning it soon became apparent to all that the hush was more than the accustomed breathing-space in the struggle. The Turk had fled, leaving the strong ridge in our hands, and the distant sound of his guns, which fired their parting protest, showed the surmise to be true, if any confirmation were required.

The brigade moved forward, and the advanced dressing station followed brigade headquarters to the neighbourhood of Herbieh. By the morning, the station on the beach was quietening down, and the last of the patients were soon set on their backward journey. It had been our intention to strike our tents before the light of day revealed them to the Turk, but, this being no longer necessary, we finished our work in comfort and then packed up. In the afternoon we had a new camp established near the brigade at Herbieh. We meanwhile anxiously awaited the arrival of the carts and camels which had left the preceding day, but before nightfall they had all come back, escorted by the guides whom we had left behind to show them on their way.

Herbieh is near the eastern margin of the belt of sand that runs northwards along the Syrian coast, a direct prolongation of the Sinai desert. This sand-belt becomes narrower as it extends into Palestine, and at Herbieh it is about two miles broad. The junction between the sand and the firmer soil is marked abruptly by the grass and vegetation that covers the latter with a uniform

surface of green, in contrast with the yellow, barren surface of the desert.

The main road from Gaza to Jaffa runs along the margin of the solid country, and we welcomed its sight as we saw it running northwards close to Herbieh that day. For already the rapid advance over the soft sand had tested man and horse, and there are limits to animal endurance.

The pestilential swarm of flies that settled down on us almost before we had pitched our tents at Herbieh, and the filth which always accompanies this pest, often with disease in its train, soon decided us to give the village a wide berth, and the following day we moved across beside the main road to a piece of clean, virgin soil.

From this moment till the time when we again struck the sand-belt at Jaffa, late in the campaign, we always had the advantage of hard ground for our operations. Of good roads such as we know them in the West there are none in Palestine, so far as our experience showed, only tracks across the country, ill-kept and uneven. As we found them, their natural poverty was increased by the heavy traffic which the Turks had subjected them to, without bestowing on them in return the large and constant attention which military employment demands. On some of the main tracks you could go in a motor car with a certain measure of comfort to yourself and safety to the car so long as the weather was good. But, after bad weather, traffic cut them up, and for days on end all road passage would be blocked. There is one road which, as we found it, was passably good—the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem. It is metalled and broad, and, before the havoc of war had settled on it, it must have been a godsend to the traveller.

The question of roads is one which will obtrude itself on your notice with an insistence which you can never understand till you have become a soldier and have served your term in a campaign in an uncharted land. It is another aspect of the spectre of "communications" which haunts you wherever you go. You have to be prepared at any moment to ride miles in heat or cold, dry or wet, to scour the country in search of a track that will take your sand carts or camels, and woe betide you if you miss a rut or misjudge the angle of a steep. For disaster, in the shape of broken shaft-poles or overturned camels, will surely wreak its nemesis on you. And, then, in your dealings with roads you have to cultivate the utmost self-control, for you will explore

the capacities of your road to the utmost, and leave it satisfied, only to find when you return with your lengthy procession that, after an hour's rain such as Palestine alone knows, your path is gone. It is nothing but a slippery incline of greasy mud, down which neither mule nor camel can descend in safety. In a gully, at the bottom of such a bank, we have seen camels with legs that had been split apart as they floundered in the mud, lying where they had been shot, and wagons turned on their back inextricably lost. They were leavings of a column which had passed in the night, and which had to force its way through at all costs.

But we were novices in these early days. We welcomed the first return to solid ground at Herbieh. Within an hour or two we had motor ambulance cars from Gaza, and for the time our difficulties of transport were lightened. Our patients were carried back to Deir Seneid, to a section of the ambulance which we planted there as a link between us and Gaza, where a hospital was soon opened up.

The routed Turk was to be given no time to reorganise his forces and his defence. The next day, the 11th, we were on the move again, and in the early afternoon we were camped beside the brigade at Mejdol. All along the road, as we passed, we met a continual stream of fugitives, men, women, children, donkeys, horses, cattle, all hurrying back to their forsaken homes at Gaza and the other towns and villages which we had left behind us. It was a sight to soften the hardest heart, and the pathos was only relieved by the evident relief and joy on the faces of the vagrants as they thought of their deliverance.

On our arrival at Mejdol we were immediately inundated with wounded and sick from the brigade of our division which had pushed on ahead of us close on the heels of the Turk. He was to be given not a moment's rest. He was fighting hard and bravely, but he had already paid a heavy toll in killed, wounded, and prisoners. By this time we were receiving through our hands a large number of wounded Turks, and by the aid of our interpreters we learnt the story of their dire straits; whilst over beside us, as we lay at Mejdol, was a large body of prisoners who had just arrived, and whose appearance told its story of dejection and despair.

There was still no pause. On the morning of the 13th the tents and bivouacs were again struck, and the brigade, taking with it the advanced dressing station, moved on to Eadud (Ashdod),



whilst the remainder of the ambulance advanced a few miles to establish a camp on the main Gaza road, which we had temporarily left whilst camped at Mejdal. Here before long the main station was again hard at work receiving the wounded of the whole division, and for the first time since leaving the precincts of Gaza it parted company with the brigade and the advanced station, which it was not to see again for two days.

By this arrangement the main station was required to establish and maintain the chain of evacuation between the forward troops and the casualty clearing station behind. Whatever happens, this chain must be kept intact at every step, and to do this it is often necessary to temporarily divorce a part of the ambulance from its brigade and to divert it to serve divisional needs.

By this time the rapidity of the advance had been so great that it is not to be wondered at if the lengthened line of communications gave rise to some anxiety. But the problem which faced us was only one aspect of the many problems which the startling rapidity of the forward progress brought with it in increasing measure. There were many others vital and impelling to engage the attention of the staff, for the division had to be fed, and the guns and rifles had to be constantly supplied. And where an army can be fed the wounded can always be carried off. Night and day we eagerly scanned the roads for wagons returning after unloading their stores of food and ammunition at the forward dumps. Many a time we sent out piquets with persuasive tongues to all the roads and tracks along which transport convoys could possibly pass on their backward journey, in order to divert the stream past our doors. Limber wagons, G.S. wagons, motor tractors, lorries, staff cars, anything at all, so long as there was room for a wounded man. There is an unwritten law of the road that the wounded man must have consideration, and at all times of the night and day you have only to ask, and willing drivers draw alongside to load on your patients and speed them back to peace and comfort.

Throughout the campaign the extraneous aid thus rendered by all branches of the transport services was of inestimable value in lessening the worries of the evacuation of the wounded. In most instances you did not dare to entrust any but the slightest cases to this, at the best, harsh mode of carriage. But by a fortunate dispensation the great majority of the casualties are only slightly affected, and, when you have dealt with them, the back of the problem is broken. Many a time, when the convoys were arriving

in quick succession, and the wounded were overflowing from the tents and bivouacs on to the ground around, with nothing to shelter them from the inhospitable skies, our vigilant watcher of the road would arrive, with evident pride, leading behind him a long line of ration wagons which he had captured. A few minutes before the prospects had been dreary, but in a short time, as you watched, the throng of bandaged heads and arms and legs had melted before your eyes, and your horizon cleared again.

Whilst the rear portion of the ambulance was wrestling with its problems on the main Gaza road—a little colony of tents forsaken save for the whirlpool of traffic that circled round it—the advanced station had reached Esdud with its brigade, and lay down to rest for a few hours on the outskirts of this town of ancient story. But they were soon astir again, and under cover of dark they pushed forward along the Yebna road in the wake of their brigade.

This was a night of suppressed excitement, for we were now very close on the heel of the Turk, and at any moment the battle might flare up again. The positions in front were strong, and it was known that the foe was determined once more to attempt to stem the onrushing tide of our advance. The men had marched hard and fast during the day, and they were glad to fling themselves down on the ground close to the Yebna road, where it was decided that a halt should be made till morning.

When morning came, the brigade moved eastward to the assault of the Beshshit, Katrah, and Mughar positions. The first objectives were easily taken, and the advanced station by the afternoon was established in the open space of the village of Beshshit. A pleasant spot it was for a camp, amongst the trees, and surrounded all round by cactus hedges. Meanwhile, the brigade was held up by the dominating positions of Katrah and Mughar, which the Turks held in force. These two villages stand about a mile apart in the open plain, which stretches eastwards and northwards for miles, each on a knoll which rises abruptly from the surrounding flat.

The retention of these villages would enable the enemy to bar our advance completely, and he had decided to defend them to the last. Along the forward slopes of the hills, and behind the cactus hedges of the villages, he had planted a formidable array of machine-guns to sweep the plain, intersected by deep wadis, across which our troops had to advance. But his determination to hang on with desperation was equalled by the zeal of our

commanders that the position must be wrested from him at all costs.

The order for the assault was given, and it was then that one of the most thrilling incidents of the whole campaign was enacted before the eyes of those who watched the fight from the adjacent height of Beshshit. In the near distance the lines of infantry swept forward in successive waves, wavering under the hail of shrapnel and bullets that swept their ranks, but ever moving onward, first across the plain and then up the slopes beyond. To the right they could be seen stretching round to encircle the Turkish flank. Our guns poured their deadly charge into the enemy defences, whilst at one place a battery galloped across the shell-swept plain into action. It was a sight to hold the eyes in awe and admiration. But the battle drama reached its crisis when across the flat ground to the north of Mughar a large body of yeomanry in close formation could be seen descending on the Turkish flank. The infantrymen plodding over the flat fields watched in breathless suspense the progress of this heroic charge. It was a thing the like of which they had never seen, and never expected to see in these drab days of battle. At the sight their hearts rose high, and they advanced to the charge on the Turkish positions with redoubled efforts. The combined onslaught of English yeomen and Scottish infantry, in front and on both flanks, broke through the Turkish defence, and he fled in confusion, leaving a whole battalion in our hands, with numerous machine-guns and some field pieces.

It was a great fight, ending in a supreme success which redounded to the credit of all; from the lower ranks upwards to the commanders who planned the *coup* and the general who led the charge at the front of his troops with an abandon of fearless courage which is still the topic of conversation when the doings of these memorable days are called back to mind.

In every fight there are incidents which, trifling though they are, stand out with distinctness against the background of weltering battle. Gossamer sensations, drifting from nowhere, a sudden breath of wind, the bray of a mule, or the sun's rays breaking through a cloud, may become firmly embedded for ever in the general picture of teeming incident which accompanies the fight. Fleeting and unimportant in themselves, they become transformed by the caprice of the mind into things that remain in memory for ever, and flood back into consciousness at the thought of the associations which saw their birth.

During the fight at Katrah, as we watched it from the higher ground, there were two incidents which we saw and remember. Walking up the village street a man could be seen in the distance, in the middle of the fight, with a metal piece of the equipment on his back flashing in the sun. Unhurried and apparently unconcerned, he continued on his way as if nothing were amiss. As we watched, also, we could every now and then see a window on the right of the village thrown up and a machine-gun commence to fire on our advancing troops. It was all deliberate. The window was lifted, the gun was placed and fired. Just as deliberately the gun was removed, the window was closed, and the man disappeared. It was a supreme piece of gallant bravado, with a strong element of humour. Later on we found the window, and were not surprised that the house-walls were riddled through and through with our bullets.

The advanced station at Beshshit had during all this time a task which tested it to the utmost. It was thirteen or fourteen miles in front of its parent ambulance, which was still immobilised on the Gaza road, and it had to evacuate its wounded to one of the other ambulances of the division at Esdud. It was only by the most strenuous endeavour, and a spirit of quiet resoluteness undimmed by circumstances that often threatened to overwhelm him, that the commanding officer of this section organised his resources and averted disaster. Pressing into his service every passing vehicle, and straining his camels and mules to the limit of endurance, he kept the backward flow unbroken and the battlefield cleared of wounded. An occasional convoy of empty motor lorries was a welcome aid, as they passed Beshshit on their way back to their refilling point, to reload with stores and ammunition for the mounted troops. These had by this time swung over to our left flank to help in the pursuit of the Turk. Motor ambulance cars carried off the most serious cases.

By dawn on the 14th November the main station was clear of patients and, getting on the move, it did not halt till it had covered the long distance of fourteen miles or so to Beshshit, where, in the early afternoon, it joined forces with the forward station. In a short time a new ambulance camp sprang up on the low ground beside Beshshit and, even before it was pitched, it was receiving casualties in considerable numbers from the other brigades of the division, but chiefly from the mounted troops on our flank, for whom, like us, the distance from their base was nearing breaking-point. There is a law of ambulance work which



lays it down that wounded men, no matter whence they come or to which division they belong, must receive at all times an open door. During these days a sand-cart or camel convoy, loaded with cavalry casualties, often turned its course towards our flag, which they had espied afar off. Their hearts were glad as they unloaded their patients at our doors, after hours of weary wandering in search of their own ambulance, which by this time was probably many miles away. After a rest, and a drink and feed for horse and man, they set off again refreshed to search for their own people.

During these battles the transport section of the ambulance performed miracles of endurance. In moving warfare the most important part of a field ambulance, the part on whose services the success of the whole work vitally depends, is the transport. If the mules or camels or wagons fail, the ambulance becomes derelict by the wayside. It was fortunate for us that we had been continually enjoined in the preceding months to watch over our animals with a most jealous eye. We were continually exhorted to guard our horses and mules and our camels with the greatest care, and, under the skilled and constant supervision of the veterinary officer of the division, we had brought our animal flesh to a state of sturdy vigour and glossy health.

It was well for us that we embarked on our new campaign with our transport in as good a state of preparedness as we had ever known. There were no better animals in the whole army. When the occasion came, the days of previous thought and effort found their reward in ample measure. From the time of Hesi right on to the days succeeding Katrah and Mughar the demands made upon horse, camel, and men were often extreme. We calculated that for several days on end, so stretched out were the lines of communication, each team of sand-cart mules did forty-five miles a day, often a great part of the time over soft and difficult country.

Our animals suffered. Some collapsed from exhaustion and were shot. Any other outcome of such strenuous days could not be expected. But, despite it all, at no time did we ever experience a serious breach in the ambulance work due to a transport breakdown. It was a hard task the warrant officer and the N.C.O.'s and drivers had to carry on, often under circumstances of great stress, but they managed it, and to them the maintaining of the chain of evacuation in an unbroken state was largely due.

## XVII. LULL IN THE STORM.

The next few days were spent in the reorganisation of our stretched-out lines of communication, in the accumulation of supplies and stores for the next forward thrust, and in rest. Strained muscles and minds were indulged with relaxation and with sleep, and for the first time in many days the men found themselves able to settle down to the enjoyment of meals unlikely to be disturbed.

After days of unceasing trek the greatest joys the world can offer are a good round meal and a good sound sleep. And in the whole range of earthly enjoyment few pleasures are so great and so all-complete as those which we derived during these days from the satisfaction of these simple demands of nature.

Bully beef, tea, jam, and army biscuits were our fare for weeks on end, and a right good combination they make, especially when the "bully" is streaked with fat and the biscuit is crisp and mealy. To get the full benefit from the beef you must turn it completely out of the tin and cut in slices ever so thin. Never offer, in an outburst of excessive grace, to open the tin, for the patent key affixed thereto has only been known to work once or twice in a whole campaign. Tell off one of your number specially equipped with the virtues of patience and self-control for this meal-time duty, and by the end of the campaign he will turn you out your beef with quite creditable ease and speed.

Every now and then, when we came near a village, a special party would be sent to forage for additions to our table, and if they were lucky in winning the good graces of the village headman or sheikh they would often return with a goodly store of vegetables and flattened loaves of native bread, which you would turn from in horror in ordinary times, but which was to us then a delicacy. On rare occasions a few small eggs would grace our simple board, for poultry was scarce everywhere throughout the country. Now and then an ox or sheep came our way, though you had to pay dear for them. Young oxen were rarely seen, and, as a matter of fact, most of the necessities of life were scanty after the occupation of the Turk. They seemed to us more scanty than they in reality were, for, fearing the confiscation of their goods, the natives contrived to hide away in a manner wholly remarkable the greater part of their movables. Large quantities of food and forage were concealed in this way. Though we lived on the

country, it was only to a very limited extent. Our chief supplies came up from behind, all the way from Egypt.

The village of Katrah, before which we lay these days, had some points of interest for us. It stands on an eminence which rises abruptly from the surrounding country, like the village of Mughar, which is about one mile to the north. The two villages first come into view after you have climbed the slopes which rise by gentle gradients from Esdud, and which fall away again northwards and eastwards into the plain. As you stand on the summit of this high ground and look over the plain, the twin villages in the foreground, placed side by side on their commanding eminences, present a striking appearance. Behind them the flat ground extends in an unbroken stretch of fifteen miles or thereby to the ridge of the Judean mountains, which run north and south across the entire horizon, and form the massive eastern boundary of the Syrian plain. Hidden away from view in its upper recesses, almost on a level from where we stood, we knew that Jerusalem was placed.

When we first saw Katrah we were impressed by the unusual character of the buildings that went to form the southern part of the village. Later we learnt that there are in reality two villages, the native village proper consisting of the usual flat-topped, closely packed mud huts, which look a dull grey from the distance. The other village consists of a small but thriving Jewish colony, the inhabitants of which are chiefly of German or Russian origin. Unlike the adjacent village of dull appearance, the houses in the colony are built on European lines, with white or coloured walls and red roofs. Each dwelling has its trim garden, and scattered trees complete a picture of considerable charm and beauty. It was the first of a considerable number of Jewish colonies which we were to see. It left its impression as being a distant outpost of culture and activity strangely welcome amid surroundings of Oriental squalor and decay. There is actually a German hotel in the place, which some of us visited, whilst our commissariat was reinforced by the purchase of some good Jewish bread.

An event of considerable importance to us at this time was the addition of a Syrian doctor to our staff. He was captured with the battalion of Turkish soldiers taken at Katrah, whom he had served as medical officer. He had been educated at the American college at Beyrout, and spoke good English. During his stay with us he proved invaluable in assisting in the treatment of the wounded natives and prisoners whom we received. He was a man

of handsome appearance and of considerable charm of manner, and we were loath to part with him when orders came to send him down the line.

We were meanwhile expecting the order to pack up and move at any moment of the night or day. The respite was enjoyed by everyone to the full, but it could not last long, for there was still a Turkish force in front of us which we dare not allow to recover from its headlong flight until Jerusalem was in our hands.

We were still uncertain as to how things were going on the right flank, and we wondered if we were waiting for developments there. Nearer at hand, we knew that one of the brigades of our own division, by a forced march, had cut the Beersheba to Jerusalem railway line, the Turks' main communication, at Mansura.

On the afternoon of the 18th the order came: "Pack up and move off at once behind the brigade to Ramleh." The advanced station was off within the hour across the plain, to fall in behind the long infantry column, which could be seen already marching northwards past Katrah and Mughar.

The remainder of the ambulance followed close behind. The whole march was carried out in a night as black as pitch, and before we were long on the road the rain poured down in torrents, and what was at the best of times a soft cross-country track was soon transformed into a slippery surface of deep mud. We had with us a reliable native guide, coaxed to face the elements of the night by the promise of a shilling and a tin of bully beef.

It was for us a notable night, in which we often came very near disaster in steering our convoy over greasy wadi beds, but we won through, and, pushing our way into an orchard to shelter from the storm, we threw ourselves down on the ground to wait for day.

Soon after dawn the brigade got on the move and struck cross country straight for the hills, where the Turks were said to be in some force. Within an hour or two the foothills of the Judean range were reached, and, passing Annabeh, the brigade, with the advanced ambulance section, halted at Berfilya. It was joined on the next day by the remainder of the ambulance, which had spent the night at Ludd.

#### XVIII. OFF TO JERUSALEM.

From the time when we first placed foot on the Judean hills our difficulties began to pile one on the top of the other. Starting from the lower slopes, the hills are covered throughout their



entire extent with boulders of all sizes, which have broken from the parent limestone. They are scattered thickly over the surface of the hills from base to summit, and give to them, and to the valleys between, an appearance of singular wildness, and in some places a certain element of stern grandeur such as one occasionally sees in the remote recesses of the Scottish Highlands.

The rocky character of the ground is too inhospitable by nature to support any considerable vegetative growth, and the barrenness of the country adds to the general impression of wild sternness. Not even a camel could get sufficient to nibble. But every here and there, by the exercise of a considerable degree of patient husbandry, the loose earth has been gathered together into terraces for vines, which hang on precariously to the hill slopes. And then, in the valleys especially, one meets with a certain number of trees.

But the dominating impression made on our minds, as we found ourselves thrust amongst the mountains, was the apparent hopelessness of our task. For how were we to carry our transport over these rugged hills and along these rock-strewn valleys? The first few days were days of great anxiety, for cleave our way through we must, unless we were prepared to admit defeat. And that could never be.

We soon found that the roads marked on our maps either did not exist or they were mere tracks zig-zagging between the boulders, along which it was often difficult to lead a horse. The Roman road shown on our maps in double lines, which in our innocence we imagined would solve our difficulties, we found had probably been a road, and perhaps it had been a good road in the time of the Romans. We were prepared to admit that, more from our knowledge of the Romans than from the appearance of the road. It had little evidence of having received any attention since these ancient times. But we had to make the best of a bad job, and time was pressing.

It is eminently true in war that where there is a will there is a way. War is above all a supreme test of the simple human virtues of determination and endurance. The rarer qualities of intellect and genius, which find their opportunity at every step in ordinary life, find their place also in the field, but it is the simpler virtues that dominate. Courage, drive, and power which endure against heavy odds, which neither flinch nor fail, but increase in measure as the difficulties and the dangers threaten to engulf in disaster the individual, the platoon, the battalion, or the army.

"Courage never to submit or yield, and what is more, never to be overcome." Find these men wherever they are and trust them with a complete trust, for they will never fail. And, if war has done anything, it has shown that the "happy warrior" of the poet is to be found wherever you go amongst the simple, modest hearts of our citizen army. They are not one or two, but many, who stand in their simple heroic strength, a theme for the poet's song.

I doubt if there have been many occasions in the whole history of war when there was a greater demand on the strength and the persisting endurance of a body of men than was made of the division which now found itself thrust into the rocky, trackless wastes of these Judean hills. As we stood on the lower slopes, which we had reached with our paraphernalia of camels, horses, waggons, and guns, we looked up at the rugged heights approached by tortuous tracks hanging in the air, where they were hewn across the face of the limestone. And we wondered how we could ever climb these mountain steeps and take with us our long procession. Guns, and waggons, and, greatest problem of all, camels!

But for us at that stage the greatest obstacles that sprang into our path were there to be overcome. The fire of victory was coursing through our veins, rebuking all denial. The Turk was there in front, creeping back from height to height, watching us with eagle eye as we struggled on, but ever refusing battle. And last, and greatest of all, Jerusalem, hidden away in the fastnesses of the upper mountains, lay beckoning to us with a call that stirred our pulse and made our hearts bound with keen, impatient desire.

We thought of the Crusaders of old, of Cour-de-Lion, of Godfrey de Bouillon, and all the rest, who challenged these mountain ramparts to free the Holy City from the bond of the Saracen. We thought, with a sympathy born of kindred struggle, of the despair and disaster that often followed them. And, as our goal was being reached, we began to feel our hearts burning with the spirit's flame—the flame of battle in a holy cause handed down from those strong heroes of chivalry and renown, whose footsteps we were treading these long centuries after.

We felt that every rock was hallowed by sacred memories. Every peak as it looked down on us in its stern, unchanging dignity, had watched the hundred holy battles that swayed to and fro along the valleys round Jerusalem. And we felt that they stood over us in judgment.

It is given to few, even in this world-wide war, to experience the chords of feeling and of action vibrating to eternal music such as was our lot during these days.

We were proud in the glory of the task in which we were engaged. We were proud of the division to which we belonged, and of the Scottish lads, whose brave dauntless hearts had accomplished in a few short days deeds that would ring down the years. And we were proud of our general, whose leadership had led us on from triumph to triumph, and whose brave, strong optimism had awakened a responsive chord in our being. So that at his bidding we would march on through danger and death to our goal.

To understand the problems that hedged us round you must remember that a field ambulance consists almost entirely of transport. The few hundred men that form the personnel are as helpless as a man stricken with paralysis in the absence of the equipment, dressings, and instruments carried by the long train and without the waggons and animals to transport the wounded from the battle.

And in the beginning there pressed on us with an insistence, which we now recall, the fact that we were almost wholly dependent on the camel. We had mule-drawn carts for our patients in large number but for our stores and necessities the camel was our only stand-by. And without him even our large horse transport would not more than touch the problems of evacuation of the wounded after an action.

The camel was a desert animal, born and reared and adapted with a perfect adaptation for the soft sands and African heat. Most of our camels were drawn from the deserts of Africa. And here we were thrust into regions the very antithesis in climate and ground of his natural habitat. Instead of the soft sand plains and the warm sunny skies of his birth, we had dragged him with us in amongst mountains of hard rock with sharp fragments at every step, and wet and cold weather which chilled even our northern blood. And he carried the whole load of an army on his back.

It was a problem to shake our trust and make us tremble with anxious fear. But our fears were beginning to resolve, for already the miracle had been wrought. We had watched him as he accompanied us across the lower foothills that led to Berilya and he showed no sign of faltering on the unwonted tracks. His gait of deliberate stateliness might be disturbed a trifle by the rocks

that strewed the path, but neither by sign nor action did he ever express his grievance. Nor during the whole period of our constant trekking amongst the hills, until we finally left them some time after, did we ever experience any disaster with our camel convoys.

The camel had now woven for us associations of a character almost sacred. And the associations were not for us only. The whole division relied on him and their trust was never belied. In the beginning the tons of baggage and the impedimenta of war carried on the many hundred backs of that long moving procession had been necessary to our success in the field. Before the end we were dependent on him for the very maintenance of life itself. Without him, with our base so many miles behind, we must have starved.

Is it to be wondered at if we tended him with a care that knew no end? We lightened his loads when the way was long. We bathed his feet when, as occurred now and then, they were torn, and we did not rest until we had found him drink, when this was due. And in our care for him there was more than the thought of expediency and a base return for our labour. But did he realise our solicitude for his welfare? It is doubtful. Never by look or deed did he ever exhibit a vestige of gratitude.

#### XIX. BATTLE IN THE ROCKY HILLS OF JUDEA.

The next few days saw the troops on the move across the hills and along the defiles towards Jerusalem. It was to be our task to turn from the west and north the positions which the Turks had taken up to guard the Holy City. The decision was taken, and come what might the rocky ramparts were to be seized before the Turk had time to recover from his plight. For every day was precious as gold. In a short period, reinforcements and guns would stiffen the defences on these mountain battlements so that an army would batter itself against them in vain.

By this time the weather had broken, and the discomforts of the elements were added to the difficulties of the passage. The men were marching light, and the animals were carrying only what was essential for battle. Blankets and bivouac sheets could not be carried when food and ammunition were in jeopardy. There was no shelter from the rain that poured from the opened heavens in drenching sheets. Nothing but the cold stone-strewn hills that stood round frowning on our misery, the emblem of cold



inhospitableness. It is during the night time that in Syria the elements give full vent to their rage, and the nights we spent crouching cold and wet against the barren rocks we can never forget. But with day the sun will break through the clouds, and the discomforts of the night are forgotten at the touch of his diffusive warmth.

Patrols had gone out to search the path, and it was decided to push on by the track along which we had forced our passage to Berfilya. This continues in a twisting, precipitous course across the hills parallel to, and some three or four miles north of, the main Jaffa to Jerusalem road.

The brigade we served arrived at Berfilya on the 19th. It spent the night there, and on the following morning set off in a narrow column up the track towards Beit Likia, about seven miles distant. The other two brigades of the division had moved on ahead, and were already engaged in the hills north-west of Jerusalem.

On the trek to Beit Likia the expected happened. Half the ambulance carts of the mobile section were broken on the way. The wheels and axles twisted under the strain, and some of the carts had to be forsaken. Those that were taken to the journey's end only reached there by being man-handled over the rocks and boulders on the road. From this time onwards we had to resign ourselves to the absence of these useful, and in some ways essential, part of our transport. They could be taken no further. But by this time the camel had asserted his position, and the breach was partly filled.

The remainder of the ambulance joined up at Beit Likia on the 22nd, and early the next morning the order to advance was received. This, as it turned out, was to be the last stage of our journey towards Jerusalem. It was in some ways the most arduous of all. We fell in behind the column about seven in the morning, and did not reach our destination, six short miles along the track, till seven at night.

The scenes of that day can never be effaced from memory. The way, after twisting across the flatter ground on which Beit Likia is situated, strikes straight for a rocky track that courses between the higher hills. Throughout, it is only wide enough for the passage of a horse or a camel at a time, and even then the footing is insecure. Along this mountain track the column that day pushed its way at the rate of half a mile an hour, and this rate could not be exceeded with all the will in the world. By

this time we were climbing rapidly, and at times the slope of the ascent in front of us looked such as no horse or camel could scale. But still the winding column moved slowly on, upwards and ever upwards.

Every now and then we would halt as a horseman or camel coming in the opposite direction crushed past, and the passing camel men greeted one another in angry tones at the interruption. Here and there the column was checked whilst a camel, which had stumbled and loosened its load, was gently led aside amongst the rocks to have its bundle done up anew. At one place we passed guns and limbers which had pushed recklessly on across crag and boulder, but which were now stuck at last with horses that poured rivers of sweat still hooked in. Step by step we picked our course until we were over two thousand feet above the sea.

Shut in on all sides by the grey speckled hills there was nothing to attract our attention from the path except here and there where we saw a dull-grey native village clinging to a hillside or perched on a hill-top. You rarely find a village set on a plain in Syria. The most remote slope or the actual summit of the hill is chosen, and in many cases the site looks as if selected for its inaccessibility from the surrounding valleys. We remember also at one place, after we had been climbing abruptly for some considerable time, turning our eyes, and finding outstretched before us, in a gap between the peaks, the long expanse of the plain of Sharon, with Ludd and Ramleh in the nearer distance, and far back, standing on the shore, the large town of Jaffa. Behind it all, the Mediterranean sparkled in the setting sun, with the warships riding on its surface, and showing in the distance as small black specks. A few more steps, and this panorama was blotted from our sight. As we reached the higher levels, every now and then we got a sight of the prominent peak of Neby Samwil with its tower shining white as it caught the sun.

After long, weary hours we reached the summit of the range where the ground was more level, and the track broadened out so that in places two or even three camels could march abreast. Our pace was quickened, and before long we passed the straggling village of Beit Anan, and then, just as the light was failing, we marched into Kubeibeh. The brigade moved on to Biddu, a mile or two further. The main station halted at Kubeibeh.

This village is sacred to all Christians as being the site of the Emmaus of the New Testament from which the Ascension

of our Lord took place. It possesses a large German church and monastery and a hostel, where pilgrims are housed during the summer months, run by a German Countess and German sisters.

We were now within a mile or two of the Turkish positions, and the tracks round the village were being shelled by the Turk to embarrass the moving troops. Within an hour or two of our arrival we learnt that the division was moving to the assault in the morning. So we had to hunt about in the dark for a site for our ambulance. We selected some outhouses adjoining the monastery, and all night long we worked at our preparations for the morrow's battle. The largest room of our house was scrubbed clean, and before long it was fitted out with all the trappings of an operating theatre, and we were ready for the performance of even the most major surgery.

In the field ambulance, for several reasons, one avoids as far as possible the carrying out of serious surgical treatment. Our function is to collect and pass on to the casualty clearing station, where the wounded are received in comfort and leisure. We must be mobile all the time, for to-morrow we may be many miles away. But there are times when all rules must give way to the inexorable force of circumstances, and for us such a time had now arrived.

We had outstripped by our rapid advance the more slowly moving hospitals behind. We could not fairly expect them to overtake us for many days. But more compelling still, we were perched on the rugged heights hemmed in all round by wastes of rock over which the carriage of a severely wounded man was impossible. We had lost our carts and the camel alone was left, and we knew that even a short journey with this animal might jostle to death a man sorely hit. We decided without hesitation that, come what might, we would hold our severest cases at Kubeibeh, and with day we would search for the shortest camel path southwards across the hills to the main road by which to evacuate our slighter cases.

We were surprised to find another division of troops in Kubeibeh and the neighbourhood on our arrival. They had come straight across country driving the Turks before them. They had only come to a stand when, after a severe fight, they had been held up by the heights that guard Jerusalem on the west and northwards.

We were soon in touch with them, and ere long we had ex-

tracted all the information they could give about the places and about the best way to deal with our casualties.

When day broke on the 24th November it found us ready.

The scene that burst on our eyes that morning we shall never forget. We found ourselves on the summit of a ridge with the same grey rock-covered hills all round. On the south the ground dipped down into a hollow and then rose abruptly for some hundreds of feet, with a track winding upwards along its face. On this strings of moving camels could already be seen, with the zinc water-tanks which they carried flashing brightly in the sun. They had caught the eye of the Turk from the hills to the north, and he was vainly trying to drop shells along the path.

To the west the road by which we had come climbed slightly and then was lost to sight where it disappeared into the hollow. Just before it disappeared it skirted a prominent summit some half mile away on which a small white building was placed. From this house an extensive view all round was to be obtained, and it had been built there for this purpose. We remember, some weeks after, picking it out distinctly among the black hills when we lay many miles away on the sand-hills north of Jaffa.

As you stand in the garden of the hostel and look towards the north you see the ridge on which Kubeibeh is placed falling away rapidly in terraces to the valley. To the left the ground rises into a summit crowned by the village of Beit Dukku, whilst in front it rises in long slopes of boulders and jagged rocks to the heights on which Beitunia and away beyond this Ram Allah are placed. The flat-roofed houses of the distant villages as they lie perched on the summits show out in sharp silhouette on the sky-line.

To the east the road struggles across boulders through the village of Kubeibeh, past the German monastery on the left and an orchard garden on the right. Further on the road slopes upwards to Biddu. Beyond, standing out some miles away, the most prominent height in the range of hills is Neby Samwil (Mizpah), a sharp eminence surmounted by a church and tower, which were early smashed by Turkish fire. It was from this height that the Crusaders of old caught their first vision splendid of the Eternal City. It is visible for many miles away on all sides, and continually springs into view as one passes along the winding road towards Jerusalem.

From the hill overlooking Kubeibeh some of our party during a spell of leisure got a glimpse of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives lying to the south-east some six miles away, with the



distant range of Moab behind. It was a hurried view, and in the heat of battle there was little time for meditation and exaltation. As it turned out, our division was destined never to enter the Holy City. Except for the hurried distant glimpse obtained by the fortunate few during these days, and some pilgrimages made some weeks after, when we had left the hills behind us, the vision of the city of eternal glory was denied to us.

With the early morning the troops moved forward, and before long the assault on the line of crests was in full swing. El Jib, Jedireh, Kulundia, and Neby Samwil were to be taken, and pushing forward, the division was to place itself astride the Jerusalem-Jericho road on the north.

The advanced dressing station was established close to brigade headquarters near Beit Izza on the west slope of the bare hill. Here it remained all day with battle seething round the little colony of white tents. Near by lay the barracked rows of the ambulance camels. Along the track that ran close to the station, men, horses, and camels in constant procession passed backwards and forwards, regardless of the Turkish shells that fell all day long. As they struck the rocks they burst with a loud crash, splitting the boulders in splinters that flew far and wide. Unlike other battles in which we had taken our part, there were here only a few guns supporting the attack. We could hear a battery firing its utmost from the hills over beside us, whilst a few yards behind some mountain guns, whose sudden barking snap made more noise than their size seemed to warrant, stood their ground all day. There was no shelter for them. They were on the open hillside in full view of the Turk, and shrapnel and high explosive burst round them all the time. But, with a defiance of danger which won the admiration of all, the gunners plied their little guns without pause.

As the troops advanced, the ambulance camels were pushed forward from the dressing station towards the battalions in order to shorten the interval of carriage for the stretcher-bearers. For the transport of the wounded across the slopes of rock was the hardest and slowest task our men had ever experienced. But organising our camel service to suit the usual needs of our time we managed to remove the casualties from the battalion medical posts as they were collected by the medical officers.

With nightfall, it became apparent that all the strongholds which our division were storming could not be captured that day, and the order to retire was given. To another division was to be

left the completion of the assault. Large numbers of camels were pushed forward to clear the field of wounded. This was carried out without a hitch. The brigade which we served withdrew to Kubeibeh, and the advanced station rejoined the parent body of the ambulance near the monastery.

Next day all the less serious cases were sent southwards across the hills to the station which we had established at Enab, on the main Jerusalem road, where they were picked up by motor ambulance cars. The severe cases which had been treated at the hospital opened in the grounds of the hostel were handed over to the care of another ambulance which had meanwhile arrived. For we had again received marching orders, and within a few hours our long procession was on the move backwards by the track which we had traversed a few days before.

We were off to Jaffa and the sea to rest and recoup! For, after weeks of hard marching and hard fighting, the men were worn and their numbers thinned. Recently, the nights spent on the mountains had been excessively cold and wet and there had been no sleep for the men, except for brief snatches when in utter exhaustion they threw themselves down on the bleak hillside with a rock for their bed. There was no natural shelter against the elements anywhere, and the blankets and bivouacs had been dumped many miles back during the early days of the rapid advance to lighten the animals and to enable the bare necessities in food and ammunition to be carried.

It is not surprising that the men were tired and worn. But their mettle was keen, and with the days of stiff marching and exposure to sun and mountain air their muscles were iron-hard and their skin was tanned a deep hue. A few days beside soap and water, with mountains of food and gallons of tea and leisure to enjoy them, and, greatest desire of all, one long, deep, warm sleep with no sergeant to cut it rudely short! Just to sleep and sleep with nothing to rouse you but the gentle awakening of nature satisfied.

We left Kubeibeh on the 26th, and halted at Beit Sera, which lies at the north end of the valley of Ajalon where Joshua defeated in bloody slaughter the enormous host gathered against him. We were to stay here over-night and continue our journey towards the sea, so we thought, on the following day. But we had not yet finished with our battles, for next morning the Turk launched a strong attack on the front just opposite us. He hoped to break through our line and seizing the heights that encircled the valley

of Ajalon to deal a vital blow at our communications. Had he succeeded it might have led to serious results, for our two main roads stretched across the north and south ends of the plain, and with the heights in the hands of the enemy they would have been immediately dominated by his guns. Instead of continuing on our road to the sea, we found ourselves thrust into the gap which the Turk had made in our line at his first vigorous rush in the early morning. For some hours there was a lively fight, but the Turk was soon brought to a standstill, and this last attempt to relieve the troops guarding Jerusalem by striking a blow at our lines of communication was doomed to failure.

XX. JAFFA—CROSSING OF RIVER AUJA—GOOD-BYE TO  
PALESTINE.

We were now able to continue our journey westward. On the 2nd December we were bivouacked in an open field on the west side of Ramleh. The division several days afterwards moved into the line on the shore sector in front of Jaffa, and on the 8th the main dressing station established itself in the spacious Jewish school in this town.

The next weeks were spent in a complete overhaul of man, beast, and cart. The clothes of the men which had been tattered by the heavy days of trek were replaced by new garments drawn from ordnance, supplied with a view to the winter which was now on us. We had lost a number of horses which had fallen exhausted by the way or which had been shot, for on the trek a sick horse is an encumbrance which must be got rid of. Only animals fit and strong are worth their feed, which during a rapid advance is never plentiful. We obtained new horses from remounts. On the whole the animals emerged from the ordeal of the preceding weeks in a way which surprised us all. This was especially true of the camels. Of them we lost very few during the march, and these mostly from shell-fire. After a few weeks' rest and feeding their flanks soon filled out again and their coats soon recovered their gloss of health. Then we had to draw waggons from ordnance to replace those which had succumbed on the Judean hills. Those we still had were bent and worn and were soon in the workshops being hammered into shape.

Our stay in Jaffa is full of pleasing memories. Our residence was taken up in the Jewish colony of Tel Aviv, which stands on

the sand on the north-east of the native town. It is a colony which was founded only twelve short years ago by a body of Jewish idealists who came from Russia fired with the desire of founding a self-supporting settlement in the land of their fathers. Combining the practical and the ideal in quite a remarkable manner, they had built up step by step on the bare patch of desert sand a thriving township which in time of peace had a population of five thousand souls. The Jewish mind is essentially artistic. This expresses itself at all times and in all places, though it is often stunted and withered by the bondage and repression of their adopted countries. With the memory of the pogrom behind them and the opening out of new prospects of comparative liberty of action and self-expression the fine qualities of the Jew found ampler opportunity for their revelation in this new colony.

The intense vitality and love of life, which is the dominating character of the Jew, here also found free space for its action. Life surrounded by the beautifying and ennobling influences of art, labour running in channels free and strong, embosomed in love and poetry and music, were the ideals which animated this small and distant outpost of Jewish culture. As a background and setting to their activities and a waking dream which fired their spirit and stirred their imagination was the glorious vision of Palestine peopled by their own best stock. Already, when we were there, the pronouncement of the British Government about the future fate of the country had reached them, and was hailed with an enthusiasm which we can only understand when we remember that this had been their constant dream for many years, and, at last, surrounded by the security of the British promise, its fruition was as good as assured.

The greatest care had been given to the planning of the little town. The houses had been built to the schemes of the best architects. They were small, painted in light and pleasing colour, and each surrounded by its garden.

When we arrived an atmosphere of unkemptness and disrepair surrounded everything. For months before the great majority of the inhabitants had been exiled by the Turk. They had been sent to Damascus, Haifa, Tiberias, and other towns further north. As a concession the Turk allowed ten of the men to remain behind to safeguard the property of the owners.

A number of the exiles were liberated as our troops captured the villages and towns to which they had been scattered, such as



Sheikh Muannis and Mulebbis, and the Jews seizing the opportunity made back to Tel Aviv. Many a procession of weary exiles we saw during these days crossing the country on foot or mounted on any animals or carts which they could lay hands on for the occasion. Camels which were often borrowed from the army would be seen laden with beds and bedding, chairs and tables, and the other household belongings which the captives had taken with them into their exile.

Within a short time a thousand or two—men, women, and children—many suffering from the effects of their harsh captivity, had wandered back to Tel Aviv. There was soon a stir of life throughout the place. The schools were opened, the Jewish hospital, renewed with equipment sent from Egypt, was working, and in many other respects the broken threads of life were taken up anew. Before we left we had the pleasure of listening to a classical concert of a very high standard provided by Jewish musicians.

For several weeks we had the opportunity of mixing on intimate terms with the people. They did not conceal the pleasure they felt in the company of the soldiers who had freed them from their taskmasters. For thriving and peaceful as their colonisation had been, it had received many harsh blows and little encouragement from the Turk, and since the war the terms on which they lived with their masters had been more strained than ever. For the Turk could not but know that their sympathies lay with the army which was advancing from Sinai into Palestine.

The next months of our stay in the Holy Land were for the most part uneventful. Some days before Christmas the division was thrown into battle again. In front of us lay the River Anja, a deep-flowing stream about forty or fifty yards wide. This was the first perennial river we had met since we left the Nile. The Turk was in occupation of the high land on the opposite side. His positions were strong, and he seemed to be secure with the river flowing between. But the decision was made. In secret portable rafts were constructed, and on a night of wind and rain, when the Turk must have thought that his security was never more unlikely to suffer rude disturbance, the brigades crossed the river and fell on the Turk in his defences with a suddenness which took him completely by surprise. It was a masterpiece of daring planning and perfect execution. The Turk was driven back, and within a

few days we were in occupation of all the high land which we required to secure our coastal flank.

This was the last battle which we were to take part in in Palestine. It was almost bloodless, and great as were the ambulance preparations in view of the difficult and unusual nature of the attack, we were almost uncalled on. No battle of such importance had ever found us so inactive, and it is not inappropriate that our last fight in the Holy Land should have ended so satisfactorily for our arms.

Within a few weeks the call to other climes came, and with feelings that were mingled, but in which there was a distinct element of regret, we bade good-bye to the country on whose altar we had laid so much of our best young blood and of our best effort.

#### XXI. FRANCE.

The preceding chapters of this narrative were written during the war, when punctilious secrecy was imposed on even the most modest literary effort. This stifling embargo removed, it is now possible to discuss events and places without restriction; though so powerful has a habit of over four years become, that the pen finds itself even now instinctively recoiling from any revelation of time or place.

It was at the end of March, in the midst of preparations being pushed rapidly ahead for a further advance of the 52nd Division north of Jaffa, that the news was burst upon us that we were to be withdrawn from the Palestine army. Within a few days all our animals—horses, mules and camels—were returned to Remounts. There was many a sad parting between horse and man. All vehicles went back to Ordnance. With the loss of our transport we sent back our native Egyptian drivers to their dépôt.

The rapidity of our movements is evident when it is stated that the 1/3rd Lowland Field Ambulance entrained at Ludd (Lydda) on the 4th April and detrained at the dock at Alexandria on the 6th April. This is the most rapid transit we ever made. It was evident that something important was afoot. We had then no knowledge of the acute crisis that faced the army in France at this time. Our thoughts were engaged with the discovery that after all the staff *could* move troops rapidly. Then we felt, more than actually knew, that we were going to France. Vistas of home leave opened before us. Some actually had it that we were going home for a long rest. This pleasing rumour had

many adherents, for most of the men in the ambulance had been away from home for nearly three years.

We embarked at once, two sections of the unit on the *Kaiser-i-Hind*, the other section on the *Malwa*.

The spirits of all ran high. The relief that filled our minds can be understood only by those who have spent long, weary months in the battle-zone. The reaction brings an inevitable tendency for discipline to slacken. And so it was with us. Once embarked, no one, except on urgent business, was allowed to land. But some gallant youths, determined to steal another few hours ashore, hit on a happy plan. Regardless of the risks and penalties of detection, with bayonets fixed they formed up on deck. An N.C.O. gave the command, "Attention—form fours—right," and with perfect composure the whole party stepped off across the gangway to the shore, everybody making way for them, in the belief that they were marching to some detailed picket duty. Later on, after they had had their fling ashore, they marched back in the same soldier-like fashion. It was a fine piece of bravado and no one was the wiser. The story leaked out many weeks after, when all chance of detection had passed. Those men almost deserved their stolen pleasures!

We arrived at Marseilles on the 17th April and were soon conscious of the reasons which had hurried us so swiftly from Palestine. We were the first division sent from Palestine, but we soon heard that others were following close on our heels.

The first few weeks were spent in equipping. We had to get a complete new transport, motor ambulance cars, horsed ambulance waggons and all the other vehicles that go to make up the establishment of a field ambulance in France. Then we drew horses from Remounts. Within a short time we were complete and ready for the road.

We recall our impressions of the new country to which the call of battle had brought us. Many a time in the East we had nursed a longing for a taste of the intense and stern life of the Western theatre of war. As the years rolled on the prospect seemed to become more and more shadowy, and it almost seemed as if we were fated to grow old under tropical skies, when with a suddenness which still left us wondering we found ourselves carried over the dividing seas and planted down in the very midst of the Western battle.

Our first and dominating impression, and it was one which remained with us throughout in France, was that here we were

mere small cogs in a vast machine. In a smaller army a division is an important unit. We came to France with our breasts filled with pride at the deeds of our division, but we found that few knew us and fewer seemed to care. If they spared us a thought, it was probably to sympathise with our position and to wonder of what use we could possibly be in France, with nothing but the experiences of wild campaigns to our credit.

And very soon we began to feel our ineptitude. Everything seemed to be different, and we arrived at a time when the whole aspect of affairs wore a look of intensity and strain, a fact which did not help us to settle down any more comfortably. We had to master a thousand and one new regulations regarding administration and discipline and all other matters—the accretions which the system in France had gradually gathered round it during years of war. We had learnt about gas in the East, but there we had merely philandered with it. For during our whole campaigning we had never once experienced it. But here it wore a visage of grim terror which we soon learnt to recognise. With many a cough and splutter we gradually inured ourselves to the discomfort of the gas-mask until we could carry it with impunity for hours at a stretch.

After a time the strangeness which we experienced at first began to wear off. Our early *gauche* efforts in a strange environment began to give place to increasing confidence, as we grew familiar with the new methods of war which we now met.

War is a stern, ruthless mistress! A man's worth is under a constant, searching test. The critical glances of a hundred eyes follow his every movement from morning till night. The gaze of his fellows impels him continuously to greater and greater effort. This publicity is part of the alchemy that so often transmutes the commonplace into the heroic, though there are other more truly ideal factors in the battlefield that stir the nobility that lurks somewhere in even the most tawdry of God's creatures.

The public glare is on every man and, whilst it stimulates to better deeds, it at the same time quickly lays bare the chinks in the armour. A man may toil to his utmost and fail. In war, failure is a sin for which there is no remission. Nothing will do but success. A man's best is not enough. Especially did this stern code apply to our leaders. The sergeant or the lieutenant might evade the major penalties, but the colonel or the general paid to the uttermost farthing. Soon after we reached France we found that one commander after another had disappeared in the



night and in the morning a new power ruled in their stead, and so rapid and so frequent were the changes that often we had not learnt the name of one before another and fresh dynasty was installed. For a bit every commanding officer quaked in his shoes, though one general, in an endeavour to anticipate his demise with a joke, had a "bowler hat" continually dangling over his head in his dug-out, which he ordered his staff-captain to lower as his fortunes drooped and to raise again when the next minute to the correspondence lifted the suspense for the moment. This general was one of the few who survived!

Amongst the other impressions which filled our early days with crowded interest was the tragedy of desolation and destruction which met our eyes on every side. There is no fairer land anywhere than the broad-spreading woodlands and rolling fields with the bright, open towns and villages of the northern provinces of France. Driving along the wide roads through such scenes, the heart is filled with rejoicing that in war the face of Nature can still retain the semblance of a smile. But a short mile or so from these signs of peace and beauty you plunge, often without warning into a mangled maze of withered woods and torn roads leading to towns that are now nothing but empty, gaping things. Their broken walls stand amid a ruin of *débris* like shattered gravestones brooding in silent protest over their desecrated dead.

We can never forget the first such place we saw. It had been a fairly large factory town. In its stead there was nothing but shattered, tottering walls and great masses and columns of twisted iron. An advanced dressing station was built into such a derelict mass with sandbags and corrugated sheeting. Above it there towered what had once been a gigantic factory building with belching chimneys and hundreds of busy workmen. One could picture the smoke and heat and manifold signs of human activity of former times. These had all gone and instead there was left only a great, empty, forbidding latticework of broken metal. Pillars and beams, loosened and loosening; some torn outwards and hanging at awkward angles, as if at any moment they might come crashing to the ground.

This sight was the first view of the titanic havoc of modern war which we had. It stands out clear against the background of memory, though many times after we saw sights of destruction beside which this town of Artois was like a mere tumbled house of cards. Later on, when the victorious advance commenced, we marched through one town after the other all levelled to the

ground. Especially can we never forget the broad town of Lens, in which there was not a single wall standing—it was nothing but a sprawling mass of broken brick.

But the ruthless devastation that lies across the fair face of France like a festering blight has received more eloquent expression than this modest narrative can aspire to. The reality of the horrible thing can never be known except by those who have seen the homeless women of France lamenting in an agony of tears over the ruins which they once called home. We remember once meeting a French soldier in a forsaken village which we entered soon after the Germans had left. He had collapsed with the exhaustion of a sixteen hours' cycle ride back to this, his native village. He had arrived soon after us and we found him standing beside his crushed home. It was the only house damaged in the street, blown from its foundations by a heavy shell. During more than four years he had dreamt of his homecoming. During the crash of battle the vision of his wife and children had ever floated before his eyes, and he had clasped to his breast the fervent hope of the meeting, when the tide of battle had turned and his ravaged France was rescued. There we found him, dazed with fatigue and distracted with the horror that he saw and the longing and the agonising fear of uncertainty for his dear ones. For four long years he had dreamed of home, and there was nothing but blasted, gaping walls. And his loved ones, where were they?

#### XXII. VIMY RIDGE.

On the 8th May we first went into the battle line. It was at Vimy, a place hallowed by many days of strife and sacrifice, though, when we took over, this sector of the line was comparatively quiet and it remained so during the whole period of our occupancy. The 51st Division, we remember, was on our right and the 24th Division was on our left when we moved into position.

The whole front occupied by our division was evacuated through two dressing stations—one in Vimy village, the other about a mile north of this, just beyond the Vimy Ridge. The village, like every other village or town near the front line, was shattered by gun-fire. Most houses were damaged beyond recognition, others were completely demolished. The station we found ourselves in occupation of was in the cellars of a house almost completely destroyed. It was quite close to the front line and was approached by a road that wound across the top of Vimy Ridge and then down its eastern slopes to the village which lay on

the western edge of the flat plain that spread for miles of bare desolation eastwards into the German area. The road was in full view of the German lines and was shelled daily. The Boche sanctioned no traffic on it. Even small parties of men would bring a salvo crashing about our heads. But by a grace which we could not fail to appreciate, he allowed our motor ambulance cars to employ the road without molesting them, so that we could carry out our evacuation of sick and wounded during the day. But no other cars were allowed.

The other station was dug deep into the ground, twenty feet or thereby under the surface, a series of branching passages and chambers fitted with wooden cots arranged in tiers. It was originally a German dressing station and it was constructed with all the completeness and luxury which the Boche knew how to expend on his dug-outs. It was approached by two staired passages, one at each end, so that if one were blown in escape was always possible by the other.

This station was safe. During the severest shelling, with the gas curtains drawn, you could live your life underground without fear. One of the great consolations of the trench life of France was this large provision of dungeon dugouts proof against the heaviest of shells. Our boys had known no such luxurious safety in the trenches of Gallipoli or Gaza and they welcomed it.

The main dressing station of the ambulance was at Aux Rietz, about four miles behind the front line. Motor ambulance cars carried out all the evacuation of sick and wounded from the two advanced posts. The roads so near the front line are always bad, as they are constantly being shelled. The road across Vimy Ridge was very bad, and being in full face of the German observers it was impossible to repair it. Any efforts made under cover of dark would become visible during the day and the German guns would soon efface any such repair, so that we had to bump the Talbots at a crawling pace across roads which became worse day by day.

Despite it all the motor-car was indispensable in forward area work. In France it had a place here which had not been possible in Palestine for ordinary daily routine evacuation, where horsed ambulance wagons were used in front of the main dressing stations. There roads had to be specially made before motor-cars could be run forward.

Behind the divisional areas in France, that is, roughly, behind the main dressing stations, the roads are maintained in repair and

the journey to the Casualty Clearing Station was carried out in comparative comfort. During the days of trench fighting those stations were a matter of five to seven miles behind the main dressing station of the field ambulances.

The forward area was barren and cheerless, nothing but trenches in endless succession crossing country denuded of houses and people and every living thing. Nothing to relieve the bare monotony except when, in the late spring and summer, a mingled blaze of blossoms grew along the parapets of the older trenches, and you walked forward to the battle-line between banks splashed with colour and flowers that bent low on either side to stroke your face and to breathe a fragrance that was out of keeping with the place. Otherwise the front area was barren and desolate. But within a few miles, where the hand of war had not laid its destroying touch on everything, the country was pleasant and beautiful. In spare hours a favourite respite for all ranks was to drive down to the Casualty Clearing Station with the motor ambulance cars carrying back wounded or sick to the hospital. Then for a brief spell they stole away from the shambles of desolation and with a turn in the road were amongst clean fields and smiling country. It was a glimpse of Paradise to minds and bodies stunted and stifled by the things of Hell. For the moment the heart rejoiced and was better. But with the evening they had to turn from their fevered pleasures, sucked back by the surge of sordid things. For long days round the mess table they would linger in memory on the happenings of those few breathless hours, on the friends they had seen or made, and on the strong women in the hospital who, out of the sympathy of their hearts, had talked and smiled, knowing full well what the few hours of their company meant to spirits that often must have seemed as if wearied out of all hope in life.

#### XXIII. BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

Towards the end of July the division was withdrawn from the line which it had held in front of Vimy for over two months. We proceeded to rest, though to be ready to move at six hours' warning. The German *abdoles* between Soissons and Rheims had inspired the hope that the tide of battle had turned, and we knew that big things were in progress, in which we were soon to have our share. The ambulance moved to a pretty little village—Fresnicourt—lying at the foot of a wooded slope. For the first time for many weeks we slept in peace, undisturbed by the menace of bombs.



There was nothing more disquieting and sleep-dispelling than the constant double hum of the Boche planes and the crash of the bombs as they fell in repeated succession all round your camp. For some weeks previously we had been in tents at Mont St. Eloi. The shattered tower that stands on its prominent hill was easily picked out from the air, even on a dark night, and the German planes used it as a guide during their nightly forays. Every night, save during stormy weather, we had gone to sleep with the air filled with the rhythmic din as the planes passed over our heads on their outward or homeward journey, and many times of a night we were wakened shuddering by the crashes that shook the earth, though the bombs might be falling a mile or more away. If you have once known by personal experience the awful havoc that a bomb can create in your midst, you remain ever after the victim of a wholesome dread. We remember how after one such experience the mere sound of a plane in the air for several days made our nerves tremble in a manner that left us ashamed.

After about a month's rest spent in the neighbourhood of Aubigny-en-Artois we moved forward, this time to battle. Within a few days we found ourselves in the 17th Corps hammering at the German positions near Mercatel.

Within a few days of leaving the rest billets the 52nd Division was thrust into the first battle it had seen since coming to France, and by a turn of fortune the area chosen for their new baptism was one of the vital spots in the German line. The fighting was intense from the beginning, but the men were heartened by finding that the Boche was gradually driven further and further back, until he finally took his stand firmly at the Hindenburg Line—that fortress of deep, labyrinthine trenches reputed to be impregnable.

It is matter of history how the 17th Corps broke through and placed itself astride the Drocourt-Queant Switch and thus for the first time broke the line whose name was awe.

These were great days for the ambulance. We were busy in front and we were busy behind. The advanced dressing stations had to push forward in the wake of the advancing troops, often moving two or three times a day. The main ambulance was converted into a corps station to tap the wounded of the whole corps of three divisions. Days and nights were filled to the brim.

But the casualties were heavy and our division was thinned more than it had ever been since the days of Gallipoli or the first

battle of Gaza. The fighting in France was never so acute as on these occasions when, in a few hours, before solid, impregnable defences, battalions were mowed down like ripe corn. In France, however, the fighting once started was constant and the wastage of a few days would bring a full battalion down to a mere handful of men.

The brigade with which we immediately worked was commanded by a general who fretted in leash during times of quiet, but who, during times of battle, was possessed by an energy and driving vigour that were demonic. There are some men who in rest are gentle and retiring to the extent of timidity, but who, during the heat of battle, become transfigured. The passion of the fight burns out all the gentler virtues and inflames the temper and rouses the spirit to herculean effort and action. The crash of the conflict, that numbs other and brave souls into palsy, seems only as music to them, piping them onward with head erect and eyes aflame with keen joy through danger and death itself. There are many such. During a battle you will find yourself surrounded by them and your heart thrills with pride for your fellow-men. The spirit is infectious, and when you are about to falter and fail you catch a glance of an intrepid soul pressing on with laughter in its eye through the shambles of death that trips the feet and strangles the very breath. The sight does you good and you carry on anew when hope seemed very nearly dead.

At this time we had a general who had a disregard for death that to many seemed foolhardy and to some seemed insane. We had known him in Gallipoli as a captain in a neighbouring division and an early death had been prophesied for him by many. Some years before us he had come to France and, instead of finding death, he had won fame and glory. It is only a mere fraction of such spirits that can long survive. A V.C. always seems to us in fancy as surrounded by thousands of lifeless forms, each of whom might have earned the highest of honours. He and a few others alone remain of that great band of gallant spirits.

Our brigadier had won the V.C., the D.S.O., and the M.C., and you were not a minute in his company during a battle before you recognised that he could not help earning distinction in the field, so long as life remained in him. Life to him then was as cheap as a straw blown by the wind. In his last battle he had had five horses shot under him within a few hours, as he rode along the front line rallying his men to stand, when they were being overwhelmed by countless hordes.

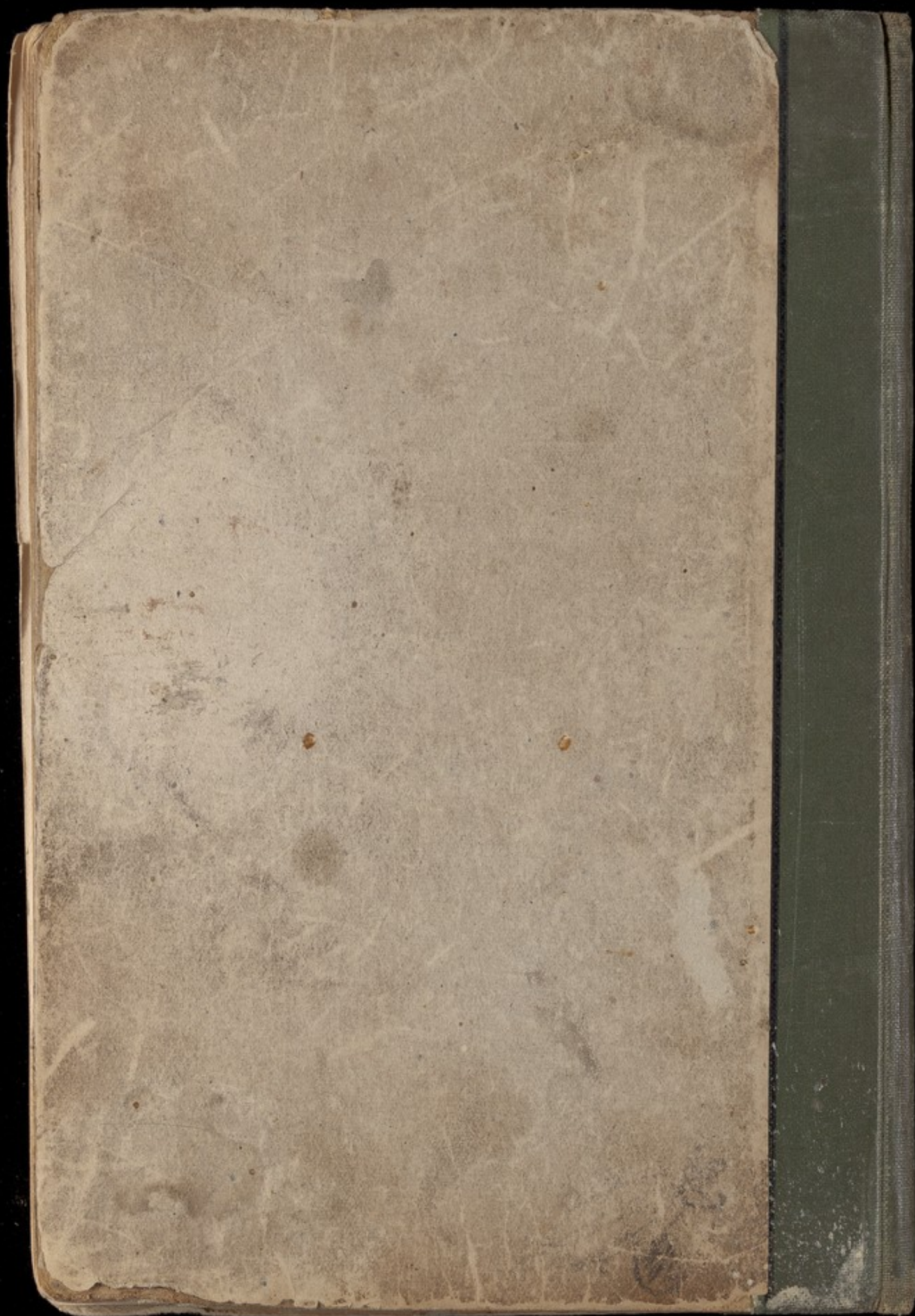
To a man less inured by temper or training to such a callous outlook on the fight he was not a wholly congenial companion. We remember seeing him on the parapet during the early days of the autumn fighting, when the whole blast of the battle seemed to concentrate itself round the spot. With a concentration that might have been focussed on a rising covey of partridges instead of on a field blackened by shell and shaken in an agony of human hate, he pointed to Hénin Hill where the Hindenburg Line could be seen by its stretch of white parapets and showed where the trenches would be attacked and taken. And he and his men were as good as the spoken word.

These were days to fill the cup of life to the very brim. Mind and heart and body were concentrated in a harmony of constant and intense action. The 52nd Division acquitted itself with credit and, the license of the Press being about this time greatly extended, the papers vied with one another in praise of the division which in Palestine had performed a prodigy of valour during its three weeks' pursuit of the Turks, when, fighting practically all the way from Gaza, it had only stopped at the gates of Jerusalem. Now, side by side with other two divisions—the 56th and the 63rd—it had broken through the Hindenburg system which, by those able to judge, had been many times pronounced impregnable. It was an interesting experience for us to be again fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Royal Naval (or 63rd) Division, which we had not seen since the days of 1915, when the two divisions struggled together in vain on the slopes of far-off Achi-Baba.

It is not surprising that, though thinned by days of hard strife, the *morale* of the battalions had never been better. The heroic stand of the five heroes of Mœuvres who, though cut off from their battalion, held out against the Germans for forty-eight hours till they were relieved, only served to whet the spirits of the division that were stirred as they had never been before.

After some days of well-earned rest, during which needed reinforcements were pushed up, the division set off in pursuit of the retreating Boche. This time our road was through Lens and we did not stop till the conclusion of the armistice brought us to a halt at 11 a.m. on the 11th November, 1918, some miles north of Mons in Belgium.





WITH THE 52ND (LOWLANDS) DIVISION--YOUNG